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The Hudson Review

IN INTRODUCING THE *first issue of a new literary quarterly at a time when activity in letters has scarcely recovered from the displacement of conflict and the consequent withdrawal of creative intent, the Editors are committed to commend those strategies and disciplines which hold experience within an objective frame and which prevent the dissolution of aesthetic constructs into anarchic sensation. It is the function of a responsible quarterly not simply to provide outlet, but to channel the manifestations of the contemporary creative imagination into the main stream of traditional insights and universal perceptions. By providing a suitable context, the* REVIEW *may make it possible for the imaginative talent to develop along those lines that reward with specific fruition.*

Necessarily, the REVIEW *must be critical, eschewing political or philosophical commitment. Impartially exploratory, universally concerned, it must be on guard against the vagaries attendant upon a constant quest for novelty and timeliness. Thus it must alike condemn the opportunism that seizes upon the ephemera of a culture, and the pedantry that would starve its roots.*

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EDITORS:

William Arrowsmith, Joseph D. Bennett, Frederick Morgan

MANAGING EDITOR: *Cornelia Claiborne*

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: *Ellen Violett*

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS: *Robert Wise, Mary Sharp*

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In the Birdcage

NOTES ON *The Possessed* OF DOSTOEVSKY

R. P. BLACKMUR

DURING THE MONTHS when Dostoevsky, homesick at Dresden, was fishing about and making notes for a novel—to be short, to be quickly written—which he owed his publisher in satisfaction of an advance, what was known as the Nechaev Affair blew up in Russia and gave a special transformation to Dostoevsky's obsessive but unrealizable theme: The Life of a Great Sinner. The Nechaev Affair precipitated out of that theme a political novel, a novel about the Russian polity of 1870; but it was a polity seen as shaped, or mishaped, by the force of his unrealizable theme. If we are to think that *The Possessed* is a political novel, we must think so only in the sense that a man can have politics whose way of dealing with life rested on a fundamental belief that a true rebirth, a great conversion, can come only after great sin. It is a politics that goes with an extreme case of this kind of mind; a politics which cannot only afford to be hopeless but which delights to be hopeless because its rewards are all outside politics; it regards politics as one of those necessarily evil avenues through which the rewards may be reached. That is to say, politics is a transgression against the good to come—but only as life itself is; to a novelist especially as life itself is. In *The Possessed,* life as transgression turned up its political aspect to the attention of Dostoevsky the novelist; and it did so by the accident of the Nechaev Affair.

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Nechaev was a young revolutionist on the Bakunin or absolutist model, who believed that the ends justified the means and that the more criminal and immoral and violent the means were, the better the ends. Claiming to represent the central authority of an international revolutionary movement, he gathered about him a cell—presumably one of thousands of similar cells—of five students sworn to his personal authority. Becoming suspicious of one of these students, or at any rate saying that he was, he brought about his murder and had his body dumped in a pond on the Moscow university grounds. There it was found. Nechaev and the others were arrested and brought to trial. There was no international movement, no central authority, and no other cells; but there was a great scare in Russia. The essence of the affair, as it unfolded, was that something false in fact was true enough in effect to make a great stir, and was indeed a trial for the country at large, leading to excesses of opinion, of censorship, and confirmed the policy of wholesale exile of intellectuals to Siberia. It was a ripe subject for a novelist like Dostoevsky, even without the murder, and with the murder thrown in, it was a subject that fell into his lap. It gave him a story to go with his obsessive theme. What appealed to him must have been the fraud behind it and the treachery within it, where the fraud was authority and the treachery was power. The strength or momentum that kept the conspirators faithful to Nechaev was drawn from an organization that never existed, not even in Nechaev's mind, and it was maintained or solidified by a treachery otherwise frivolous. Yet by a fraud in Nechaev's mind, a great stir could come about. Nechaev was a small fellow with a small mind. To a novelist the question would be: what would happen if a real energy should go to work, with help from some other appropriate, always available energy, on the basis of a fraud equally hollow but with a more desperate because more deeply generalized intent than anything Nechaev showed. What reality would that make? What fraud how deep in what heart? At any rate, one way of looking at *The Possessed* is to conceive that these are the questions that it asks. What motives does Dostoevsky create?

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At first, as is common with "serious" artists, Dostoevsky thought he was dealing with motives outside his art, the presence of which might ruin his art. In a letter written in the spring of 1870, when the novel had not yet shaped itself, he wrote that he had great hopes of it; "I don't mean as a work of art, but because of its tendencies; I mean to utter certain thoughts, whether all the artistic side of it goes to the dogs or not. The thoughts that have gathered themselves together in my head and heart are pressing me on; even if it turns into a mere pamphlet, I shall say all that I have in my heart." That is to say, he had the ordinary man's instinct for decisive judgment and fulfilling action; it was only the habit—the clothing and characteristic stigmata of the profession—of the novelist that prevented him, in his eight hundred odd pages, from writing a bloated pamphlet. The habit of his calling overcame the need of his emotion; he overcame, by writing a novel, both heart and head, and transformed decisive judgment into the judgment of the looking-glass, fulfilling action into the dramatic image of the stresses of things upon which, in exigence, action is made. The "tendencies" and "thoughts" which in his letter he asserted to be his subject became qualities, clues—even keys—to his true subject, the question: how does it come about, beneath both heart and head, that such things can be?

We have as much right to the clues and keys as Dostoevsky had. Even the novel most wholly a novel is both full of the ikons of mysteries still pressing and cluttered with the debris of mysteries no longer experienced; without "thoughts" and "tendencies" we should be overwhelmed by undifferentiated emotion. The thoughts and tendencies stand between us and the raw force of emotion which is the vital part of the novelist's material, just as for Dostoevsky the thoughts and tendencies were tools for focussing, for converting from one phase to another, more available to the lasting transmitted part of the mind we call the intellect, that same raw force. In life we tend to forget the nature of the force in anxiety over our conversions of it; but it is the rational purpose of the novel to remind us what the force is, throughout its phases,

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which we have converted, and it does so by showing the experience of those who have mistaken the mere conversions for the thing itself. That is what happens in *The Possessed* at a number of levels, not all of them levels which Dostoevsky recognized in his own consciousness, some of them being indeed at the level of mistaken conversions unwittingly made by Dostoevsky himself; for the novelist can never avoid dramatizing himself, and can never be more objective than when he does so. It is precisely by dramatizing himself into the situation he sees, and his ideas into the raw force he feels, that he comes nearest to answering the question which is his subject: how comes it such things be?

That is how we have the same right to the clues and keys of thoughts and tendencies that Dostoevsky had; they have for the nonce of the novel become absorbed into the subject, and they are made to seem to grow out of it, like vital dogma, in so far as they are, by the process of the novel, conversions from one phase to another of the raw force of emotion. The relation is not obscure, but it is the reverse of theology and of most philosophy; here, in the novel, the dogma gives the raw force one among several possible purposes, and the raw force enlightens the dogma no matter which purpose is chosen. The relation is not obscure, it is clear; it is the relation in which we understand why we must love our enemies, not that they may cease being our enemies, but because God loves them without regard to the enmity between them and us. It is in the novel, more than in any settled form of art, that our thoughts and tendencies—the dogmas by which we catch momentum day to day—come into their only true concert, the concert of conflicts; and it is in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*—because of the sharpness of the dogmas, the extremity of the thoughts and tendencies—that of all novels this is most clearly seen to be so.

It is with this in mind that the present essay means to add to the task of seeing what human motives Dostoevsky could create by turning the fraud of the Nechaev affair into a novel, the further task of seeing what happened to the thoughts and tendencies in Dostoevsky's mind under the pressure of that novel.

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What happened to The Life of a Great Sinner when told as the tale of an extreme, but fraudulent, nihilist conspiracy? Pushing the question one step further, How does it come about that the one theme is the double—the other self—of the other? Is there after all only one effort in which man can dramatize his evident need as vital purpose? Is there in the end no difference between the effort to be a superman and replace god and the effort to find god in man? Whatever the reality, are the god-man and the man-god in actual experience the same? Is actual experience always hallucination with respect to the real? Which, finally, is more wholly hallucination—the extreme of self-will or the extreme of submission to the will of God,—the shambles of pride or the glory of humiliation? To ask both sets of questions is the novelist's only answer to either.

To have these questions in mind—in whatever version seems the most appealing idiom—is to be in sufficient knowledge of Dostoevsky's clues and keys, the thoughts and tendencies he meant to write about when he began *The Possessed*, but which got transformed by what invited a focus for his attention as soon as he had got going, the force of the Nechaev Affair. The attractiveness of the Nechaev Affair, the reader should be reminded, had special features for the Russian novelist of 1870: the novel was the only relatively free form of expression a Russian could use; the novelist had, and was expected to have, the force of the publicist, the prophet, the preacher, and, above all, the reporter. Every other form of expression took more or less the avenue of conspiracy or of secret force, both autocratic. The weak or reformist liberalism of the 40's and 50's which had had immediate ends in mind, seemed to have been replaced by a violent and revolutionary anarchism which had destruction as immediate end and a secular millenium as ultimate end. The shift in attitude would seem to have a relation to the precipitation upon the cities and towns, partly because of the liberation of the serfs in the 60's, of a socially rootless and impoverished intellectual proletariat; a shift that was only sharpened and emphasized by the state policy towards that proletariat. *The Possessed* was published serially be-

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tween January 1871 and December 1872; and during that period the educated proletariat whose image it projected were being sent to Siberia at the rate of a thousand a month. When the intellectuals become predominantly a proletariat it may well be that they respond to the horror of their unreality with positive terror; it is their remaining actual weapon. Dispossess a man of mind and sensibility and he is likely to become possessed; that is to say, he is likely to be invaded by those forces which, by encompassing his own destruction, would strike a blow at the immortal part of society: which is, however it is phrased, the characteristic temptation of the possessed: the temptation of suicide to become murder, of politics to become anarchy, of man to become god.

All three are phases of the one temptation, and the people who inhabit *The Possessed*—all but one—are given over and come to their ends through one or another phase. The exception, Stepan Trofimovitch Verhovensky, stands as much as anything for the immortal part of society against which the blows of the nihilists are directed; he dies, but only what is mortal and mistaken in him; he is incorrigible, he is guilty, he is beaten, but he will come again: he is the eternal possibility of the man clothed and in his right mind. He is the man who *knows* that he sits on his own bottom, no matter what pomp or servility he may pass through. Perhaps that is not how Dostoevsky thought about him, but that is what the novel made him come out in the aspect which is clearest to the west European and American mind. He is the foil—the background and future—against which the incommensurable nihilism of his son Pyotr gathers meaning. Stepan Trofimovitch is the justification of the mottoes which Dostoevsky prefixed to *The Possessed* from a poem of Pushkin and the Gospel of St. Luke.

The motto from Pushkin is about riders who have lost their way because demons have bewitched their horses, and the question that asks itself is about the dirge the demons sing: whether it celebrates the birth or the death of evil. The motto from Luke is about the man who, having been possessed by demons, has lost his way and recovers it by exorcising them into swine who at once "ran violently down a steep place into the lake and were

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choked"; after which the man sat "at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind"—at which the swineherds were afraid. There is an ambivalence from the motto from Pushkin which, so to speak, Dostoevsky's novel—not his thoughts and tendencies but his novel—forces into the motto from Luke. We know we deal with the cycle of evil, but we do not know at what point in the cycle we are, and therefore cannot tell by what expense—or whether we can afford it—we can exorcise the evil and come out clothed and in our right mind. If we think of Dante, who also dealt with a situation where *la diritta via era smarrita*, alongside Dostoevsky, we shall see what the ambivalence in *The Possessed* has to do with our sense of what is possible to the imaginative mind. Dante, in *The Divine Comedy, knew* that his concept of order would encompass any disorder the nature of man might provide. Dostoevsky *knew* something very different, that his insight would surpass any anarchy in which man's nature might end. In Dante, man remains intact. In Dostoevsky, there may be nothing intact.

II

In *The Possessed*, it is the purpose of things to get out of hand; they are then pursued as far as the limits of Dostoevsky's vision could reach within the form of the novel as he understood it. The limits of vision were radical, in the character of his sensibility. The form of the novel was accidental, both as he stretched it and as he failed to take up its possibilities. In between, affecting each—by constriction and by propulsion—his thoughts and tendencies maintained, and above all picked up when it slacked off, a mutual relation between vision and form. The vision is of an intolerable society which most men are incapable of rejecting though the means are at hand to do so, and which they are therefore bent on destroying; this is because the vision of Christ, in the minds of those unequal to its burden, creates the vision of anti-christ: which is, so to speak, the precise measure of their inadequacy. The form of the novel is the form most appropriate

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to an intolerable society: it is a serious use of the form of crime and detection generalized, universalized, and then again specified. It is a form that controls only one aspect of the force it releases. In it the great affairs of men in society are carried on as if they were so many intrigues, puerile and degrading farces, childish conspiracies: as if, that is, the affairs of men could provide only so many opportunities for private crime and general guilt. Neither the corrective force of observed manners nor the richening force of daily preoccupations, as in Tolstoi, bring the form of crime and detection to anything like liveable proportions. Thus Dostoevsky had chosen a form which made life itself fit all the negative aspects of his vision, meanwhile adding to rather than diminishing the dramatic interest of the form; it was the right form for his leading thoughts and tendencies about the world of the anti-christ—it was the very form of life that prevented the continuous revelation of Christ, or, failing that, his second coming. It gave him a chance therefore for prophetic rage and apocalyptic insight; it gave him a chance to dramatize the positive side of his vision rising out of the negative side as its drama got out of hand—not as a contradiction nor as a new saying, but as an inevitable growth. This was the opportunity that his thoughts and tendencies made to seem spiritually possible. It would almost seem that the whole of Dostoevsky's thoughts and tendencies can be summarized in the single idea that, whether for the individual or for all mankind, the cost of the real vision of Christ was the previous, actual experience of anti-christ. No experience other than absolute guilt—and perhaps not even that—could create the utopia of forgiven man.

If this sketch of the relations between Dostoevsky's vision, form, and leading ideas is approximately correct, we can see why the politics in *The Possessed* is a non-social politics, why its principles are conspiratorial, why the conspiracy fixes upon a hallucination, why the hallucination spreads through society. We see too why this hallucination can not pass off by daylight, but must be exorcised either by the god-fearing Russian people (that is, the peasants) or by saints (those who have passed through the

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hallucination). To Dostoevsky, exorcism and conversion are political instruments, because the only true politics is in religion, and the image of the true society is that of a theocracy of saints which has engorged the state. Again, if we remember that to Dostoevsky moral freedom was always the great objective for the individual, and that to him the great gift of Christ was moral freedom, we see why in this world of the anti-christ—whether political or social—the possibility of moral freedom without God could only show as the possibility of sin. We see why crime had to be construed as sin, and we see why Stavrogin was raised *as a sinner* in his crimes to the status of a god. If we had ever been able to complete his role as Great Sinner, we would have seen too how he could have stood as exemplary witness to the god-bearing Russian people.

But Stavrogin did not complete his role—even less than his counterparts Myshkin in *The Idiot* and Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov* completed theirs. It was not only that Dostoevsky could not construe his positive vision beyond its conventional prototypes—Tihon in *The Possessed*, Zossima in *The Brothers Karamazov;* it was not only either, that no writer has ever fully portrayed any greatness save his own, and that by his style—which is why we *know* so little and believe so much of Christ. It was not only these; it was also partly that Dostoevsky was, at the crucial point, always a little heretical in his orthodoxy; the crucial point was in his psychology—in his sense of the relation between the ideals in the mind and their corresponding actions in the soul. He could not bring himself to envisage as united what he felt as separated by a great gap; he wanted so desperately to do so that he would do so honestly or not at all. He not only gave the devil his due; he knew that the devil lived in his own heart unexorcisably, whether by saint or peasant, certainly not by thoughts and tendencies. At any rate, that was what his working imagination proved in the fact of his novels: that there was a terrible gap between the actuality of spiritual experience and the ideas by which he got at it. It was as if he knew that his ideas, like the saint and the peasant who symbolized them, were institutions

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that like all institutions compromised reality in the interests of mere getting along and killed the living faith in the interests of certainty. Thus Dostoevsky was more Western than he thought, and a child of the French Revolution and brother to the Commune, beyond his power to realize except—since he had no classic irony to support him—with horror and repudiation. It is lucky for us that this is so; it brings his whole predicament nearer our own if we can bring the range of our common ancestors nearer. Why can not we say that Dostoevsky too had experienced Rousseau's vision on the dusty noontime road? He too saw that all that is evil in man's life comes from the institutions he has created to prevent—or to forestall—a continuing revelation. For Rousseau his vision meant a point of departure, for Dostoevsky it meant an ambiguity so great and so terrible that he was condemned by the persistence of his means to the deprivation of certainty in his chosen end. The nearer he got to it, the nearer he got also to the ever-present alternative of its opposite. Nevertheless, the two men were on the same track—or lost on the same track—and we can understand Dostoevsky better by remembering it.

Both men were adepts in the prepotent disorder which existing institutional orders only hold in check for the moment. Both were skilled in their fuller works at setting afoot outbreaks and contagions of disorder which any acceptable order must in the end encompass if it is to survive to cope with the next batch of disorder. Both knew that true order was something continuous that happened to disorder. The temptation in Rousseau is to assert panacea in popular sentiment and popular will, which, since none can conform to them, leaves every state illegitimate. Dostoevsky's temptation is to assert panacea in popular sentiment guided by absolute authority reached by conversion and faith; which leaves every government not a theocracy illegitimate. Both carried their assertions far enough to risk the exclusion of the disorder they meant to encompass. They forgot its prepotency in doctrine, though they returned to it in experience. Yet each was a good prophet, and both became so by two means: by bringing images of the underlying disorder in man's life into the open

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in terms of the existing order of their times, and by asserting an ideal for its control alien to any possible politics. That others *therefore* corrupted their ideals is the matter of our history. That they themselves—and particularly for us, here, that Dostoevsky—never in the end drove the ideal through against the force of actual experience is the mark of their greatness. In Rousseau, it was as if the honesty of common sense entered and weighted his emotion. In Dostoevsky it was as if—a much rarer thing—the honesty of raw emotion, the force of the things he was, entered and bent his will.

It is at this point that we can actually re-enter the novel. It has been with us all along, closing round us, with a motion which we may hope is analogous in our terms to the motion with which it closed round Dostoevsky, that is with the motion of a thing possessed, to which it is only possible as it is only prudent for the time being, to give in. We see at once a darkness, with fractions of light, the splinters of things in motion; an uncomfortable darkness, with motions as unmotivated as they are disorderly, as consequential in fact as they are frivolous in inspiration. You have an idea that when people disappear they descend into some degraded form of themselves, into their own soil, where they absorb their peculiar strength to return. No common knowledge of them is possible which is not scandalous; no ultimate knowledge is probable which is not catastrophic. They are swine and their throats will be stuck—or if not, there is a steep place at hand. Destruction is all that they can come to.

Such is the atmosphere of the provincial capital where the natural disorder of things gets out of hand, and it is created by a "vast conspiracy" of thirty people, a conspiracy thought to be nihilistic but actually a clique of run-out higher liberals, without aim and without a leader. They are flunkeys in thought, but without a lord; for whom their nearest substitute is Stepan Trofimovitch Verhovensky, a day-dream glamor boy of progressive patriotism, a Gulliver home from Lilliput, who has written a noble letter of self-defense but cannot think whom to send it to. He is a fiasco, altogether in the power of Varvara Stavrogin, whose

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son Nikolai he has in the past tutored. He has also a son Pyotr, due to arrive soon after years of absence to claim the inheritance Stepan has wasted. Varvara, the great lady of the town, has "the cruel and insulting despotism of a crazy woman." Knowing Stepan loves her, knowing also the impending scandal about his son's money, she orders him to marry her ward, Dasha Shatov, with dowry enough to pay off the son and something besides. Stepan drinks too much, gambles too much, dreams too much: his future is to him a "colossal ordeal," and he tries vainly to build up enough will to reject it and go forth naked in his old age. Besides this harmless old gull, there are many others: Liputin, an elderly official, an ex-general, perhaps an atheist, certainly a scandal-monger; Shatov, born a serf, an expelled student, sullen and violent, one of those who is shamed because unequal to his own ideas; Virginsky, a pathetic poor man who has all the latest ideas and convictions in their crudest form; Lebyadkin, a dubious buffoon and cad, who sleeps with Virginsky's wife and eats his food, but who, as the story goes on, has a house of his own and unexplained money; Lebyadkin's sister, the crippled and half-witted Marya whom he beats when drunk; Kirillov, an engineer interested in the ratios of suicide, an objector and dissenter, with a dark, muddy-colored skin and lustreless black eyes, another Raskolnikov whose crime is against himself; Shigalov, the rigid doctrinaire reformer. There are others in the group or near it or who become attached to its contagion—Gaganov, Drozdov, Lyamshin, Erkel, and Fedka. Altogether apart from the group but affected by it are such people as Karmazinov the run-out author, Governor Von Lembke and his wife Yulia, Shatov's wife Marya, "Stavrogin's woman," Lizaveta Tushin, and Mavriky her faithful lover. The list is long, and there are others not named. They represent the town; all are in disorder; and in the lump they are rather like a slice of Dickens' society seen out of kilter through dark glasses.

To them come Stepan Trofimovitch's son Pyotr and his pupil Stavrogin, the one an unknown, the other a known mystery, and because of their coming the town is changed from a scandalized community, to an hysterical community, and then to a place—

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not a community at all—of the possessed. Their power lies in their personalities and in the mystery of their personalities, which both tempt others to make more of them than they are, and (thus) to find motives for themselves in the mystery. Dostoevsky is here depending on the great truth that, though most people desire serious motives, they do not ordinarily have them in anything but a routine sense. By presenting his conspiratorial group as sunk to the routine of scandal he has laid them open to the full hallucination of motive at the hands of any energy greater than their own, however itself in fact unmotivated. This is sometimes called the attractive force of leadership instead of personality; and it helps explain the power which gathers to every heroic and priestly class. Dostoevsky made use of this force not only in these two figures in *The Possessed,* but in such other figures as Svidrigaïlov in *Crime and Punishment,* Myshkin in *The Idiot,* Versilov in *The Raw Youth,* and Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov.* In fact none of these novels could have acquired and heightened their momentum without the force of these figures. They not only cause things to happen initially but they set up trains of contagions of action; contact with them crystallizes emotion into motive; and they seem either to have the power to create or obliterate personality in their followers or their victims. Whether such figures exist in any statistical sense is immaterial; we like to believe that they exist and to act as if we were in contact with them. The demimonde of our culture is full of them: sibylls, witches, fairies, poltergeists, great detectives, and the supermen heroes of our comic strips, all belong to the family. They represent the inexplicable and uncontrollable power which, as we believe we have it —or as it possesses us—moves us without penalty of personal responsibility. The interpretation of the social sciences as an absolute determinism is a secular hocus-pocus which corresponds to these figures, whereby we go to ruin, or have our way, in complete freedom. No matter how they may appear, these mysterious figures are among the favorite hallucinations of our mortal lives, and equally whether they work for good, for evil, or for both.

Once Dostoevsky set them up, all he had to do to get them

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going was to draw lines of initial relation to certain characters in the group. For Pyotr, aside from his relation to his father, the political relation was enough: the intellectual proletariat in the town was already rootless enough to believe in the coming terror; Pyotr had only to say that it was on its way, that he represented its secret leadership, and so take charge. Beyond that, he does three things: he stirs up malice in the community from top to bottom; he tries to solidify his position in the group by a common crime, the execution for treason of one of its members who had merely wished to leave the group because of a change of heart; and, third, he tries both to get Stavrogin in his hands by a combination of blackmail and crime and to make Stavrogin the chief or leader of his conspiracy and so make it real in the ultimate sense as well as actual in the immediate sense. He is an enthusiast and like all enthusiasts requires a force not his own and beyond his understanding to keep his enthusiasm alive. He depends on Stavrogin, as a man depends on his property; he must add to it to keep it, and must put it to use in order to add to it. On that basis all Pyotr's actions become understandable.

Stavrogin needs more attention, if only because he has to stand behind Pyotr; but also because he has to stand behind, in different ways, a great many other people: he has to contain in himself, in perfected, ordered form—that is to say, with order and disorder balanced on the knife's edge—the disorder of the whole town. He has to be a hero and come to tragedy, where Pyotr has merely to succeed and come to failure. Stavrogin has to remain a mystery and to do so by taking on himself the mystery of other things. Both the people in the book and the readers of the book must know a great deal about him and be the more mystified the more they know. In his notes for *The Possessed*, Dostoevsky, according to Simmons, was acutely aware of this. "Very important," he wrote, "the prince reveals himself to no one and is everywhere mysterious," and he reminded himself "to keep the reader in a quandary." This he did, but he shows a great deal of what he fails to reveal. Perhaps Stavrogin's essential mystery is that he has led a part of the life of a great sinner and is seeking,

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to the last act of his life, to lead more of it. If so, it makes more rather than less of a mystery to give it its name; just as the maximum mystery of any life in which it happens is the mystery of a change of heart and the assumption of a new life. At any rate, in the book, a part of his mystery is shown in his relations to Shatov whom he has made a believer; to Kirillov, whom he has made an individualistic nihilist, to Marya Lebyadkin the crippled imbecile whom he has secretly married as a gratuitous stroke in debauchery, to Liza whom he loves in a way intolerable and inadequate to her, to Pyotr whom he has inflated to an intolerable predicament by false assurances, no less pervasive for being largely tacit, and to the Elder Tihon to whom he confesses his ambiguous debauchery, ending in her death, of a little girl. (Though many have argued the contrary, the originally suppressed chapter in which this abortive confession is related does not clear up the mystery of Stavrogin but deepens it. It is an abortion, a failure in birth, in the life of a great sinner: it shows Stavrogin *unable* to break through into a new life, but condemned instead to insult again the society by which he would be saved.) These are all episodes which show the creative power of the mystery in Stavrogin's personality; and the credibility of that power to the reader will depend on how far he "believes" in the effect reported on each of the characters, and on how far he accepts the verisimilitude of the change, in his presence, of the general situation as it is reported directly to the reader. Stavrogin tells us nothing himself.

We know him only by what he rouses in others, how he appears to others, and, to a certain extent, how he appears in contrast to others. As we reflect on this system of representation and its intensity, we begin to see that he is intended to be one of those creatures of man's mind which are their own meaning: a symbol from which one takes what one brings. That is why, at Tihon's, he breaks off his evident effort at regeneration by physically breaking an ivory crucifix: he breaks, or creates, in each person with whom he deals, the sign of what that person is in himself. That is why, too, Dostoevsky had to prepare so carefully for his first

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appearance on the scene of present action by giving a history of his previous appearance, three years earlier. He had come then with a reputation ahead of him as savage, reckless, brutal and callous: a debauched bully, fresh from living deliberately in rags in the dregs of Petersburg. Yet when he arrived, instead of a sodden drunk, he was an apparition of elegance, a man with a fateful secret, by rumor a murderer. The ladies were wild about him, either in adoration or hatred. He had light-colored eyes, his cheeks were too red, there was something repellent in him that suggested a vampire. The stories about him turned out probably to have been true: he pulled an old man by the nose as a "calculated and premeditated indecency," and instead of explaining his actions he bit the governor's ear; after which he relapsed into a brain-fever, or as we would say, had a breakdown, recovering from which he went away for three more years. When he reappears in the midst of a scandalous scene at his mother's, he is in the company of a strange young man, Pyotr Stepanovitch Verhovensky. Pyotr enters first and refuses the embraces of his father. He is described as one who suggests ill health but is well, round shouldered but strong; too articulate; not ugly, but no one liked his face; with a tongue of special shape with an everlastingly active little tip. In contrast, when Stavrogin follows him in, it is said of him that he is unchanged, except that a mask-like quality to his face is gone and that he is now incontestably beautiful, shining with the light of some new idea. His first act is to lie when his mother asks him if Marya is his wife, and then to speak gently to Marya. His second act is to take a blow in the face from Shatov's whole fist: merely staring Shatov in the face, holding the white-hot iron of his revolting, terrible, *reasonable* anger. Thus he begins his work.

He begins it 180 pages into the novel, at the end of the first Book. He could not have come earlier because neither the reader nor the novel would have been prepared for him. Most of all, what we call in translation of a phrase of Dostoevsky, the underground man would not have been prepared for either Stavrogin or his self-appointed lieutenant Pyotr. When they come, many

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things have been set in motion—by scandal, by spite, by the sense of the man under the bed, most of all by the underground man: the verminous cockroach sort of man who comes up through the cracks from between the floors; precisely the condition of the intellectual classes turned proletariat, but not limited to them. It is among people who have turned to the underground phase of themselves that Stavrogin apears. The odor of lice is thick. It is only concentrated in the buffoons, Lebyadkin and Liputin; it is only pitiable in Stepan Trofimovitch; piteous in Marya; desperate in Shatov; absolute in Kirillov. Against them the underground man in Pyotr is reckless and enthusiastic, in Stavrogin ambiguous.

It is from his ambiguity that Stavrogin gets what Shatov calls his immense power, by which he can raise Shatov from the death of nihilism at the same time that he confirms the living nihilism in the heart of Kirillov. It is by communicating the shadow of this power, too, that he raises Pyotr's "extraordinary aptitude for crime" to enthusiastic action, making of him a madman engineering chaos out of hysteria. Indeed, in the second Book of the novel there is a progressive laceration of the underground man to the point of private hysteria. Only Stepan Trofimovitch, the fiasco of the old liberal, gains through these lacerations; most of what is false in him is lacerated away, and he has the special sad strength of feeling that his die is cast—*Alea jacta est.* All the rest come nearer that breaking point when private hysterias burst into the open and become public disorder. The promise of what is to come shows in small incidents where what is revolting excites mirth: the substitution of pornography for tracts in the gospel woman's bag, the secretion of a live mouse in the ikon of the Mother of God, Liza giving her diamond ear rings for alms, the unseemly behavior on the expedition to the saint and prophet Semyon Yakolevitch, and the two scenes between Stavrogin and his double Fedka, the peasant murderer. Everybody is going against each other and against himself at the same time. It is the immense power of Stavrogin that presides over all this, both as creator and creation; and it is his image, as the true arrogance of

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man, that gives whatever unity of impression the novel has. His image makes it possible for the reader to tolerate the breakdown of form and uncertainty of intention in the middle of the book, where what seem riddles are tensions, where blows in the face become holy burdens, and where also there is a vast deal of high jinks, Dickensian, Quixotic, and perfectly hellish at the same time.

This account of the power of Stavrogin should not be taken as implying that Dostoevsky failed to carry along the political side of his tale. The politics is what Stavrogin enlightens and obscures, first one and then the other. The political side of the novel is kept going at three levels. Pyotr's conspiracy is made to gain momentum, a quintet is formed out of the group of thirty, and the quintet is first inured and then pushed to violence. The fête for the new governor and on behalf of the nurses goes forward in confusion, incompetence, and in the growing certainty of fiasco as well as failure: it is known beforehand the buffoons will get the upper hand and the riff-raff will take it over. Furthermore, there is an account of administrative breakdown and corruption at the centre and a rise in crime, cattle plague, and cholera in the whole area of the province. The combined momentum—intelligible, desperate, mad—is irresistible. The conspiracy ends in murder, the fête makes fiasco, the people make a mob, all at once.

But, to repeat, if we grant the momentum, it is only Stavrogin's image that makes it understandable, makes it human—the kind of humanity Nietzsche was to find all too human. Let us take two examples. One is in the chapter called "Ivan the Tsarevitch," where Pyotr makes his last bid for the support and leadership of Stavrogin, offering to do murder for him, and indeed afterwards procuring murder for him. "The Pope shall be for the West, and you shall be for us!" he cries. "You are beautiful . . . you are the sun, and I am your worm." Here Pyotr kisses Stavrogin's hand, and goes on, that without him he, Pyotr, is Columbus without America; that Stavrogin is the hidden God, the *Deus Absconditus,* into whose hands it is so fearful a thing to fall; more Russian than that, Stavrogin is also identified as Ivan

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the Tsarevitch, Ivan Filipovitch, the God of Sabaoth. Finally, this criminal enthusiast cries out: "There's no one on earth but you! I invented you abroad; I invented it all, looking at you."

There is one image for Stavrogin. Here is another, from the suppressed chapter, "At Tihon's." Stavrogin has gone to the holy man to find a means of playing the martyr at the heroic level, and when they have had some discussion to the effect that atheism is preferable to believing in the devil without God because "the complete atheist stands on the penultimate step to most perfect faith," Stavrogin asks Tihon to recite from the Apocalypse the passage about the luke-warm Laodiceans, and in the midst of the recitation interrupts to say, "I love you very much," to which Tihon answers, "And I love you." Exactly at this moment of *rapprochement*—what he had come for—Stavrogin becomes difficult again, is *irrité*, rats and mocks Tihon, saying that he needs no one and can shift for himself. Yet precisely because of the nature of his independence (that it must affect others like an immense power), and at the moment he is about to assert it most brutally, he requires of himself that he demand the mercy of Tihon. Unlike Shatov he does not entreat mercy but demands it; unlike Kirillov he cannot make greatness of soul express itself in an unbelief which is the equivalent of death. Nor is he luke-warm; his ennui is positive and frightful. He hands Tihon the written sheets recording his debauchery of the twelve-year-old Matryosha, whose tiny shaking fist he by his own will keeps still before his face. Why does he make this confession?—because he wants to exchange one kind of suffering for another, to substitute the cross for the devil, but also because to make his sin public would be "another way of nipping the governor's ear"—another way to challenge society, to find an enemy, to express his power in such a way that it would work. There lies the true arrogance of Stavrogin, that his force must work, that he must degrade his power in use. His role in its purity is intolerable to him, because there it would do no work; though he wants the purity, and knows what it is in the sense that the complete atheist knows what faith is, he must nevertheless cripple it, degrade it,

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so that it will do work—and must at the same time chastise himself for doing so. Since he cannot be a saint he will be heroic among the enemies of what he cannot be. That is why, though he scorned it, he did not reject Pyotr Stepanovitch's invocation.

Stavrogin, then, is one of those symbols through which men merge their thwarted selves, and find such a momentum of action as carries them to the brink of rebirth and to the suburbs of destruction. They are the momentum of that part which is hopelessness in the human enterprise: the hopelessness that shows most, and as a terror, at those times when the intellectual classes have become, as they had in Dostoevsky's Russia, a proletariat. It is the kind of momentum we feel in society when everything in politics and religion expresses itself as a form of power. That is the situation meant by Lord Acton's phrase, that all power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely; the momentum is what is corrupted. It is characteristic of Dostoevsky that he should have begun, as he says, by taking Stavrogin out of his heart, a typical and tragic figure, in order to break that momentum in an image of rebirth; it is even more characteristic that when in the honesty of his imagination he discovered that his tragic figure could not go beyond the momentum of his sin, he surrendered him to that momentum. Stavrogin hanged himself, in sound mind, afraid of sham greatness. He could not find God in man; he would not become a god-man.

On that, Dostoevsky ended his book, but it was only a formal close to go with another, less formal, just behind it. In the next to last chapter, "Stepan Trofimovitch's Last Wandering," we find that there had been another momentum at work all along, another inertia than that uncopeable inertia which Stavrogin presided over. It shows in the apotheosis of Stepan Trofimovitch, father of Pyotr and tutor of Stavrogin, from the flunkey into the Don Quixote; and in the apotheosis we see an *éclaircissement* of the text of the swine which Stavrogin's death could not give. What has happened to Stepan Trofimovitch? Beginning with the casualty of "culture," the parasite of progress, the mere creature of Varvara Petrovna, a man given to hysterias, vanities, unmoored

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allegiances, we proceed through a stripping which becomes a devastation, a vastation, a rehabilitation, an apotheosis. In detail there is nothing not taken from the twenty years of romance and fiasco, but in substance it is all taken from the reality of which the romance was the protective lie, the *Bovarysme,* the protection put on, like the French language, the love of Shakespeare, Raphael, brandy, and champagne: the great protection of *The lies I have told all my life.* But there is a truth in the protection as there is a truth in the lies: in the reasons why these lies are told rather than other lies; and perhaps they are not far different from Kirillov's reasons for refusing to invent God, or from Shatov's reasons for holding that viable faith depends on keeping connections with one's country. Stepan Trofimovitch, as he lies dying, is the old Westerner, and all he sheds of the west in his apotheosis is enough to show that he is a rooted Russian after all, at bottom, at the end: of his "cause," his course, his romance, his life. He *recurs* to his different selves; but as Varvara Petrovna tells the priest who has just confessed him, Wait: he is such a one as must be confessed at every hour.—What does that mean, if not that he is permanently alive; permanently on the edge of resuming the "lies" he has told all his life—just as permanently on the edge, if only he could, of ceasing to lie.

This old liberal is one who teeters between the gospel and champagne; between a great tenderness and a great folly, between a blessed revealed order and an anarchic rejection of all imposed order. But he is not the teetering; he is the living thing that teeters. He is the obstinate finality in human nature that needs both gospel and champagne. He is that immortal, hopeful part of man, with shifting but unarrestable momentum, that has never needed either a hero or a saint; hubris is not in his line; he is Don Quixote without Sancho Panza, and he tilts at real things. On his deathbed he hears by accident the passage about the luke-warm which Tihon had quoted to Stavrogin; it is new to him and he rejoices that it is better to be cold than only luke-warm. Then he asks for the passage about the swine, and, after hearing it, makes his own wholly unheroic attestation. Russia, he says, is

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the great invalid, and a great Will from on high will enter into her and cleanse her as in the lunatic possessed of devils. They will beg to enter the swine. "They are we, we and those . . . and Petrusha and *les autres avec lui* and I perhaps at the head of them." His last words were that "The Infinite and Eternal are as necessary for man as the little planet on which he dwells." He says nothing of the hero and the saint.

It is not that Dostoevsky asks his readers to choose between Stavrogin and Stepan Trofimovitch; how could he ask a choice where he could make none himself; but he set them side by side, each impervious to the other, each lost in his own temptations, those of hopelessness and those of hope, with a kind of incommensurable equivalence in their disparate momentums. You cannot create, you can only bring destruction, by Stavrogin's kind of momentum; you cannot destroy, you can only go on, by Stepan Trofimovitch's kind of momentum. The one is necessary to conceive against the other as life is necessary to conceive against death. Each "possesses" the other, unawares.

It is only because Stavrogin and Stepan Trofimovitch Verhovensky inhabit the same novel and are forced together in the same country house called Skvoreshniki that their absolute disparity could seem to have an ambivalence. The name of the country house means in English a birdcage. Verhoven means supreme, and supremacy is what Stepan Trofimovitch could not undertake. Stavros means cross (in Greek of the kind that Russians know) and his cross is what Stavrogin could not take up. By the politics of the birdcage, in the prison of life and looking to liberation, these seem much the same.

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In a Bad Time

How mad would he have to be to say, "He beheld
An order and thereafter he belonged
To it"? He beheld the order of the northern sky.

But the beggar gazes on calamity
And thereafter he belongs to it, to bread
Hard found, and water tasting of misery.

For him cold's glacial beauty is his fate.
Without understanding, he belongs to it
And the night, and midnight, and after, where it is.

What has he? What he has he has. But what?
It is not a question of captious repartee.
What has he that becomes his heart's strong core?

He has his poverty and nothing more.
His poverty becomes his heart's strong core—
A forgetfulness of summer at the pole.

Sordid Melpomene, why strut bare boards,
Without scenery or lights, in the theatre's bricks,
Dressed high in heliotrope's inconstant hue,

The muse of misery? Speak loftier lines.
Cry out, "I am the purple muse." Make sure
The audience beholds you, not your gown.

—WALLACE STEVENS

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Cats and Dogs

The house of Temperance, in which
doth sober Alma dwell,
Besieged of many cats, whom stranger
dogs to flight compel.
—The Faerie Queene
(with substitutions)

TO THE READER

Black dogs running on the sands;
Who knows such querulous hounds?
Dry catblood cakes the orchard lands;
Who runs, who runs, following what sounds?

Do you know these coffee dogs
Ran ransom for a king?
The king fell, the king fell; the coffee fogs
Hid the giant cats which spring.

You know you quicken when a cat is meant,
Mixing warmth with claws;
You king, alone in your dark tent,
You wrestle with his shapely paws.

Yes, cat's whiskers rubbing close
And cat's eyes in your face,
Mere preludes to the final dose:
Strangling in a cat's embrace.

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THE CATS ATTACK

The jury dog set verdict on
The monarch torn by the cat.
These sane and prudent dogs had gone
To keep him spinning where he sat.

Had run to save the balanced king;
He tumbled and he fell to claws.
For cats range the plains and sing,
Cats catch the spinner with their paws.

Kingly exercise is due
The man who sits the temperate rope.
He spins to keep his balance true
Above the tilt and perilous slope.

Whirlpool of cat, cats singing,
Nasally intone his verbs.
The quickened fervor of their springing
Pulls against the kingly curbs.

Crawl, you cats, and swarm;
Invest this house and all that's in it.
Yours is no apogee of give and take.
Your seizure is the crux of injury.

THE DOGS TRIUMPH

But then the black battalions rose
Dog-chilly from the liquid sea
And equipoise they interpose
The beaches with the bloody tree.

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They pace among the springing cats,
They strike among the orchard rows,
As beauteous racers of the flats
Would step, imperial of pose,

To slay in swift accord the dark
But bleeding swarm of cats convened
And chanting there; they cannot mark
The lacquered dogs, the jury fiends.

THE KING RESTORED

Juristic dogs, to break the injury
The cats bestowed upon the willing king.
Juridical, to force stability
Upon his weak and tumbling wing.

What were those trees? What injuries,
Those entrails clawed in the quickening morn;
That monarchy superbly torn?
Verdict rose coldly from salty seas.

Custodians of mist, at rest
Among the dripping groves, had browsed
Upon the heart's cold dew, and evanesced,
Receding through the watery boughs.

Black dogs running on the sands;
Who knows such querulous hounds?
Dry catblood cakes the orchard lands;
Who runs, who runs, following what sounds?

—JOSEPH D. BENNETT

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A Summer Campaign

ALEX COMFORT

A MAN WALKING in the edge of the forest was making his way toward the sound of running water. As he walked he ran his hand up the back of his head, brushing the pine needles out of his hair whenever he felt them prick him. The needles underfoot ran in little banks across the sandy ground, and the walking man avoided stepping on them. His feet were laboriously wrapped up in lengths of calico. All but the soles of these improvised shoes were relatively clean, so that he could not have walked very far. In front of him the trees were beginning to thin, and because it was early thin layers of mist were hanging at various levels, edgewise like cobwebs. Walking through them he put up his hand as if they were likely to cling to his face.

Among all this sandy ground, going up and down among the groups of living and dead spruce trees, there were numbers of white stones like eggs, collected in nests at the foot of slopes and in hollows, or lying singly. The walking man looked at them, thinking at first that they were edible, turning them over with his great-toe where it projected from the bandages. For a little while he left his course and wandered about from one fictitious nest to another, convincing himself that these were stones. As he went on into the next belt of trees, all dead and all silted halfway up their trunks so that their lowest branches went down into the sand, he brushed aside another skein of mist. He was wearing grey dungarees stained with oil, and between his shoulderblades somebody had burned in them an oval hole with brown edges, under which his skin showed. At the top of the slope, the stones were noticeably larger, like smallish loaves of unbaked bread, a

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few stained with rusty streaks as if the baking had already begun. He passed through yet another belt of trees, some living, some dead, where the stones were as large as bald heads. The wood was waking slowly, but nothing moved. He could hear cawing and the cracking of twigs, and a few of the dead trees carried large untidy nests, which the rise of the sand had brought down until he could look into them and satisfy himself that they had been empty for a long while.

"The river ought to be out of harm's way," he was saying to himself. "But there are no birds—not even a sparrow. They've left—they've had the sense to go." A loud hollow noise like a stone dropped in a pot brought him to a stand. He waited, and it echoed and ran about among the trees—knock. Then there was a roulade of knocks, a roulade of echoes. For a few minutes he stood wondering whether to go on.

"Must get to some water, at any rate." The echoes of the knocking had finished, died down, but he still listened for them, going gingerly ahead and putting his bandaged feet down carefully among the stones. These were lying now in shoals, the size of little pigs, among which the trunks had to insinuate themselves, to bend out of the straight. From among one such collection of stones a heron went up, frightening him for a moment. Then he rubbed his hands and began to hurry, stepping on the rounded surfaces of the biggest stones where they had caps of moss. Presently he crossed a line of dry reed-stalks and driftwood which wound in and out through the banks of stones as far as he could see. Soon after, he crossed another. Then, going down a bank of stones as big as sacks, he came to water.

A few feet out, a curtain of mist was hanging, opaque and motionless. The water between the last of the stones and the edge of the mist was full of little floating cylinders of reed pith. Among them a turnip was bobbing, its purple top like the underside of a ship. He leaned over and fished it out by the haulm, rubbing it on the leg of his dungarees. The trees at the top of the bank were overwhelmed by the stones. All the crevices were wedged with pale crumbling wood and innumerable bunches of

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feathers and bones. A neck of bones ending in a beak projected from almost every hole in the bank like a peculiar plant. Lower down, where the mist crossed the stones diagonally, there was a low sandy cliff.

He went back to the top of the bank and looked over the top of the mist. It lay low enough for him to see its upper surface going out into a general haze. Upstream a few ducks were crossing this field of smoky white, making it eddy. Downstream, something was tossing about on it, a gigantic curved back like the back of a whale. As the mist moved, he identified the curved girder top of a bowback railway bridge. At the same moment, another volley of hollow knocks came from below the bridge. He ducked instinctively, and then went down among the stones, knocking off the dried birds' heads as he scrambled.

It was clear to him that he ought to move away from the bridge, and yet it was his only chance of crossing the water at this point. The firing seemed to come from the bridge itself, yet sounds are deceptive—there might be nobody there. He squatted down, holding the turnip, and waiting for more sounds.

All the time the mist was moving further and further away. Leaves bobbing on the water and moving slowly down towards the bridge came in sight, then a solitary duck that scurried back into the mist bank. Presently from the bridge itself he heard a bugle blowing Rations. The footway of the span was still below mist level but the whole arch was clear, and near its middle he could see a hut or crowsnest of some kind with a stove chimney that smoked.

Waiting for the mist to clear, he took a paper bag out of his overall pocket and began to spread out its contents on one of the stones. His fingers were cold in spite of the sunshine. He fished out in turn a razor blade, a box of matches, a piece of bread to which fluff from the pocket was adhering, a packet of army-issue chocolate, and a card. The card was a travel warrant, punched in several places, carrying innumerable red stamp-marks. He tossed it into the water, and immediately regretted having done so. He might have kept it to light a fire.

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He was not an old man, though his forehead was bald. He had good muscles, a thin face, bad teeth—his left ear was deaf, and in listening he was forced to turn it away. An electrician by profession, his desertion had been a matter of policy, not of terror—he had never been near action. He gathered up the oddments into his pocket, all except the turnip, which was too large. He rubbed its purple top with his finger and pushed it into his bib, against his chest, shivering as he did so, and thinking of a blanket that had slipped out of his reach among the ammunition boxes in a railway wagon the night before. Concealed in a cavity among the boxes he had felt its edge creeping further and further off, had struggled with it in silence and darkness under a stinking tarpaulin, leaving hold only when a box came close to cutting his fingers off, and it had dropped down among the cases, where some poor bastard would find it later on.

The mist had shifted, he could see the other bank four hundred yards off, a low cliff and a wall of the big stones: pigs' backs in the sties which the base garrison had fed all the winter, nuzzling round your boots fit to knock you down, while he waited for the weather to break. The bank rose out of a fine haze of reed stems, seeming to float on the water. The tail of the mist was going under the bridge. He could see it all, the span, the railway running out on piles, something, a bucket or a group of buckets, hanging from the bridge span itself, the hut with its thin smoke. The current was slow, oily, running against the piles below him and circling back along the river shore towards the group of stones where he stood and the little cliff, a bite out of a soldier's loaf, where there was a little shore scattered with debris and broken river shells. All the green edges where the trees were alive had begun to smoke as the sun struck them. The ducks were too far out to reach. He dared not pelt them. Figures were moving on the catwalk of the span. Their size told him that the hanging object was also a man. He clicked his tongue, trying to guess what it was that he had walked into. The firing that morning and the hanged man, revolving against a dazzling patch of sun under the bridge below him, were part of some pattern. In the

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hut, where the stove was burning, two men in uniform were probably talking and cooking while the fellow under them went to and fro across his patch of light, out of harm's way.

He set off away from the bridge, nosing about among the drifts like a dog, in the hope of finding something useful. The reflux of the current kept pace with him, full of the little rods of pith.

A hundred yards up stream, between two stones, a man was floating on his back. The walking man saw his arm first, the stripes of a sergeant, the blue nails of the hand, and realized that he was dead. The cap and equipment were missing—otherwise the sergeant was fully dressed in his uniform. The walking man got down among the stones, made sure he was well out of sight of the bridge, and began to unwrap the calico from his feet. The sergeant was red-headed, his face the face of a young boy, and that too had been red. The red scalp was folded back, and a cluster of delicate white membranes had escaped into the water. The other realised suddenly that he had never seen the inside of a man's head before. He stood up and pulled at the boots, turning the sergeant over and releasing a scatter of minute sticklebacks which had clustered under him. He pulled the sergeant round the corner of the nearest large stone and undid first the boots, then the belt, then the tunic buttons, making faces as he did so. In the pockets there were a few objects, which the electrician disposed in a row on the side of the boulder, where there was a little shelf. Once the tunic and trousers were gone, the man ceased to be a sergeant. He had grubby soldiers' underwear, with a label sewn into the back of the pants, carrying the brand mark, a red merino sheep. The electrician clicked his tongue again when he saw it. If it had not been for the sheep, he would have stripped the man further, because he was extremely cold, but that small patch of cloth with its mark had never been intended to float down a river. Accordingly he maneuvered the body round by its feet, and pushed it out head first into the stream. It left a little wave behind it, and went out into the mist, becoming entangled in a clump of reed-stalks that were floating.

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The sun was fairly up behind the bridge. There was still no sign of life anywhere on the catwalks of the bridge, except the line of smoke going up from the bogey in the guardhouse. The electrician gathered up the things which he had removed from the sergeant's pockets and scrambled cautiously back away from the water. He had put on the boots, and they fitted him—the other clothes he left to dry, after spreading them out carefully, like a woman. Finding a little hollow among the stones, full of pieces of dry reed stalks, he sat down in it to inspect what he had secured. There was a small pair of field glasses, not army issue glasses, but personal property, the sort of glasses one would take to the races. They were spotted with water, and the artificial leather on the tubes came off and reddened his hands. He unscrewed the lenses and polished them, pulling out the flap of his overall for the purpose. When he had put them back he looked at the bridge. The ramshackle hut came suddenly close, and he could see that it was sandbagged. The sun dazzled him as he caught the patch of reflection with the hanged man swimming in it. The man was a bearded biggish fellow. A piece of what appeared to be electric flex had been tied round his elbows. From the waist down his body hung in the undulating patch of sun, and nothing could be made out of it but a shadow. This was one of the oddities of war. Somebody had hanged the fellow there, as naturally as they would hang out a shirt.

All the time the morning was brightening. Ducks flew over, three passing in a cluster like aircraft, threading between the bridge girders and parting neatly to avoid the hanging man. The tops of the reeds on the opposite bank were moving irregularly—the whole bed was filled with men.

He was in a quandary. For all he knew, there might be just as many of them behind him. He laid out the captured uniform in front of him. On his back the hole in the shirt was like a cold plate—he could feel it each time the air moved. In these clothes he could be shot as a deserter if he were taken by his own side. In the uniform, he could be shot as a soldier if the partisans got him. A bare skin is something of a safeguard—in the nude, no-

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body can tell your opinions, whether you do your duty, or whether they ought to shoot you. But it was cold, too cold to go back to that state.

He shivered, and was meditating about this, and looking hungrily at the uniform, when he realized that he was not alone. One of the bird skulls, a thing as thin as paper, was overset by a movement, and fell with a little sound. As he turned round, he shut his hand on one of the round stones—the dead man had had no weapons, and he could throw straight. He had once won a prize for throwing. A child was looking at him over the pile of stones, a sleepy child who had just been woken. The child spoke to him in a language he did not know, looking him up and down, as frightened as a small animal. He put down the stone and found himself trying rather furtively to cover up the effects of the dead soldier. A smoke-ring went up in the opposite reed bed, and a sharp crack came back from the wood behind, repeated half a dozen times up and down the bank, a diminishing salvo of echoes. The child looked over toward the bridge like a frightened rabbit, and as he did so the middle of the span was blotted out by a dazzling and irregular blue flash which seemed to hang suspended there, leaving a blotch of light in the man's eyes, round the edges of which hundreds of small fragments with white, smoking trails splashed into the river. He was surprised to see the bridge still standing, one of the smaller ties bent a little, the hanged man swinging like a bellrope underneath a rising smoke-puff. Then there was an outburst of machine-gunning from the sandbagged post, which raked up the surface of the water and deluged him with cold drops. He pulled the child into his hollow and lay there beside it. The reed bed became alive with shooting again, an arm flew up out of it, and he could see, moving among the reeds, the hands and body of a man who was holding a steel leg. The deserter noted that that was no way to manage a mortar. The man's body was curved as he steadied the thing—for a moment he saw the face—a young boy's face, bearded and wearing a vacant expression between pleasure and exertion. His ears were tingling with the last burst, but he heard the whistle

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of the bomb. Another splash of white light covered the lower girder, and the hanged body became wildly animated, disintegrated as though it had been blown up from within, and scattered astonishingly, in the middle of a circle of smoke where the rope still held, and a cylindrical remnant swung to and fro, circling like a pendulum. He glanced at the child, but the child, a very thin boy, with the motheaten hair of all underfed children, was staring at the bridge, neither frightened nor comprehending, but fascinated.

And so it happened that this battle had two eye-witnesses, who lay among the stones while it was fought over their heads, neutral observers ducking their heads at each burst of shooting. A column of steam suddenly began to rise on the opposite side of the bridge. A train which had been waiting in the wood for its opportunity revealed its position by blowing off steam. The officer in charge of it rushed down the track, tripping over track spikes, to see if the steam could not be stopped, knowing full well that the watchers had seen them coming miles back, and were waiting expressly for him—still he ran, risking snipers, to see if something could not be done, while his men lay flat on the floors of the coaches. From the side of the engine cab, where the noise of the steam prevented him from making the engineers hear a word, he could see the bridge and its pillbox as a sunlit strip of track, crossed by girder shadows, a fifty yard glade in the trees, ending in a stony cutting. He pitied the poor devils on the bridge, and felt as though a physical obstacle, a sheet of glass, separated him from it. He thanked God that the locomotive would take him across, that he did not have to walk, but only speak some words, give some orders to the two engineers—local men, who might be in the plot—for he could not have trusted his own legs to obey him at that moment, and go out into that alley of sunlight where the smoke of the last bomb was settling. The older engineer was a toothless, ropy man, into whose ear he shouted, brushing the grubby cloth cap with the rim of his helmet, and as he did so the steam ceased and the echo of it receded into the trees. He could

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hear the diffuse mutter of the river, and found himself still shouting at the top of his voice.

The driver and his mate inspected the officer and waited until he spoke, the driver methodically rubbing grease off a brass handle with a little cloth, the other pushing the fire-door to with his toe. It was getting hot, and the locomotive shone and simmered.

The officer explained to them that they had better try to rush the bridge, and instructed them to back. The driver bent his head and reversed without a word. Standing on the step, the officer saw the trees beginning to move back, and behind the tender his ten coaches full of troops, lying on floors according to orders, waiting to go through the hoop, then the two vans of baggage, then the antiaircraft truck, and lastly, in the metal van at the tail, two tons of miscellaneous H.E. whose existence, fortuntely for everyone, the troops in the coaches were supposed to know nothing abut. They stopped again, half-round a sandy bend which showed the officer a few hardy insubordinates looking out of the windows. The bridge had narrowed to a strip of sunlight between two cliffs of trees.

"All right," he said to the driver.

The driver seemed not to hear at first, and then, as the officer was opening his mouth to repeat the order, he pulled on the regulator bar, his eyes shut and his mouth half-open, showing his gums. The fireman picked up his shovel and laid it down again. Then he crossed himself very methodically. The trees began to creep past. Individual stones in the cutting wall turned into a blur. The strip of light with its pillbox swung into view. Suddenly the driver twitched his throttle wide open and a fountain of smoke and sparks went up, marking their progress as effectively as if someone were standing on top of the train waving a flag. The officer tried to speak, found himself enveloped in noise, and almost on the bridge itself. He encountered a sideways view of the river, of the pattern of reed-beds and currents, of the sandbagged box, of a face at an embrasure. Then the driver made a movement, the uproar of the exhaust stopped, and the officer was almost thrown off the engine as the brakes went on. They halted,

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fitted squarely onto the bridge. The driver turned away from the controls as if he were tired, and stood waiting for what was coming. The officer grabbed for his pistol, every part of him itching to be ten yards further on, into the cutting, to get his men off that shooting-gallery, to finish the man who had let him in for this. The fireman had slipped over the side and vanished. He shot the driver, and the man collapsed without a sound. He was alone now—he had no idea how to drive a locomotive. As he went to the controls he found himself stepping on the dead man—he tugged the regulator, but there was no response.

Considering his position he kept his head well. Two thoughts were competing in it—to get his men out and running for it on the blind side of the train, to fathom why the ambush was holding its fire so long. They had been stationary for some seven seconds. He had time to solve neither. The two eye-witnesses, hiding among the stones, had seen the train pull to a standstill—the deserter almost stood up to yell "Go on, you fool, go on!" A series of patches like the full disc of the sun appeared along the train—smoke rose, and a dazzle of pieces shot all ways. The water was pitted with fragments. In the reed bed a hollow, theatrical cheer, the voice of ten men trying to sound like a regiment, went up. The train party were jumping for it now. There was a fusillade of shots. The remnant of the hanged man had vanished. The child was covering his head with his hands. One of the ambush stood up, a red-headed man in an overcoat. A sergeant, standing impotent among the smoke which filled the pill-box, and half-dazed by the infernal racket round his head, shot him with a rifle and was astonished to hit him. The rest of the ambush were shooting wildly. Men kept dropping off the bridge into the water, some alive, some dead. The electrician, if he had had a gun, would have fired indiscriminately at anyone he saw. The whole battle had lasted about half a minute, but he was already tired of it, of seeing men dropping off the bridge with the same gestures, of the blackish smoke from the train which was closing down on the line of the water. The mortar fired again, and on this occasion it hit the last wagon. The deserter found

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himself lying on his back, well outside the hollow in the stones, looking up into a spiral vortex of smoke, through which jagged objects were falling, choked with dust, and as breathless as though he had fallen in cold water. The child was unhurt, his hands over the backs of his ears, lying like an old soldier. Everything else was smoke, except for a burning patch of wood, where one of the spruce trees was streaming with flames which ran horizontally in the afterblast of the explosion.

The whole scene was transfigured. The bridge was swept clean, and hung tilted over into the farther eddy of the stream, a long backbone of tea-coloured ripples going through it. The sandbagged post had gone, and the coaches of the train, skeletonized and covered with little smoking and flaming points, were held up only by the frame of the girders—only the locomotive was unaltered, except that its whole surface had been stripped of paint, and it was riddled with holes and large blisters from which steam was still escaping. Round the place where the wagon of H.E. had been, there was a ragged hole fringed with erect and contorted rails. Trees were burning round it, and the reed bed where the mortar had been hidden gone, replaced by a greyish level of burnt stems, smoking, and littered with irregular bundles of debris. The ambush had bitten off a little too much. It had vanished. The deserter, raising himself cautiously, his ears filled with a prickly deafness, and shielding his head in case of another fall of debris, could see the remnants of the mortar dangling in a tree. The mudbank was swept clean of men. Someone, beyond the bridge, rose out of the mud and went running and staggering sideways into the wood, and as he went there was another crash and another volcano of black smoke at the edge of the crater, into which water was streaming in a frothy spiral eddy.

The child raised his head slowly, his eyes wide, feeling himself carefully and finding himself whole. The deserter pulled him down again, and they lay waiting. The smell of shell-fumes blew over them, a sweetish unpleasant smell like the smell of meat or of decaying vegetation. The crackle of the fire became audible.

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A fine drizzle of cinders settled on them as they crouched in the hollow.

The elderly man sucked in air through his teeth—it was too close, too personal to grasp—this was not a battle. Damn it, if he had not got out while the going was good, he might have been in that train. He might have been floating about, dead or near-dead, black as a burnt match. He looked at the child, but the child seemed unastonished and able to take it in. He was interested in the exposed interior of the locomotive, even the ragged-looking dead. That morning he had gone to sleep by the river, and they had provided this film, this display of fireworks, for him.

The deserter looked around the stone-bank. There was nobody moving. Close to them in the water lay something which had fallen. It was a red-leather letter case, of the kind which officers take round with them in their kit, a present from someone to someone. In the larger cities women can buy them with a metal back, supposed to be bullet-proof. This one was unscratched. He would have picked it up, but then he noticed the same hollow knocking which he had heard when he first came down to the river. The gun in the pillbox, the foundered and half-submerged pillbox, was still firing. He showed his head, and there was a roulade of knocks.

Then he noticed out of the corner of his eye that the child had its eye on the red case.

"Hey, keep down!" he said, forgetting that the boy could not understand him. He made a grab at the child and missed. A line of splashes approached. The child got his hands on the case and tumbled back into the hollow. It was a few seconds before the deserter, who was getting ready to scold him as if he had been a child of his own, noticed that he had been hit. It surprised him that the child did not cry, and had not fallen at once. He had been too busy keeping his own head down to notice. The child's face was beginning to twist up as he felt the pain. The deserter felt over his leg, tried to assess the damage. When he turned the round, dirty thigh over in his hands he saw. The wound dropped open of itself—the bullet must at that range

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have been spinning, or a ricochet. The child fainted, relapsed into the same sleep of which all this had been an incident.

The deserter wrapped the wound up in one of the parts of his own shirt, and put the tunic which he had collected round the boy, like a shroud. Evidently one did not get away so easily. He picked up the boy and began to run. Nothing struck him, and nobody fired. Once among the trees he continued to run, first over the stone bank and later, when he reached it, along the railway line. When he was tired out, he sat, and then walked on. Once he passed a solitary signal on a steel mast, and below it an empty hut. The linesman had gone and left nothing but a few chalk marks. The tracks had the thin wartime film of rust which the train that was lying on its side in the river might have removed, if it had got through. Because of his hunger he himself felt rather like some sort of machine. The sleepers were too far apart for him to tread on each one of them, and too close for alternate steps. There was rough ballast between them so that he had to go in lame hops, like a hobbled mule.

The child did not move. Blood was running out of the tunic. The deserter put him down several times to see if he were alive. It was midday, so far as he could judge, before he saw a group of huts and cottages, standing in a bay of sandy-coloured cliffs filled with roots, at the side of a cutting. He began to run again.

When he reached the huts he found that they were roofless. Clothes and broken chairs, very rough peasants' chairs, were scattered about. There was a smell of fresh fire. All the walls were intact, but the surfaces of the beams, like the ribs in a dead sheep, stuck up from them covered with a square plush-pattern of charcoal. He put the child down and went in among them. He found a body, a man's body, in shirt-sleeves, and a broken jug in the first house. In the second, a smashed room where a clock was still ticking. The whole place was dead, newly dead, and foodless. The only fresh thing was a poster in black type on a fence, headed REPRISAL. Even the two fruit-less apple trees had been neatly cut down. There was another smell beyond the group of houses, a smell of dead people. He did not go there, but picked up the

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child and went on. The child was awake now, uncomplaining and drowsy. He looked at the broken houses as they went by, the deserter picking his way among pots and pans, avoiding a hat which lay there as if it were alive. He had an unpleasant feeling that the child had lived here, and that the destruction had taken place while he was asleep on the stone bank. Once after that he stopped to scoop up water for him from a drain by the side of the line. It was late afternoon before he saw two huts, a line of wire, a man in a tunic with a gun.

If he had been a raider he could have shot the man. Instead he yelled in his own language, or attempted to yell, but the sound his voice made was small and as unfamiliar as the rest of the world. The man spun round, and came over, pointing a rifle at his midriff.

On stretchers on the ground there were two soldiers asleep under blankets. On a third stretcher, another man was getting something from a tin mug held by an orderly. The deserter heard shouts, and saw a medical officer come out. If the child had not filled his arms, he would have saluted as usual. Instead he laid him down.

The officer was a thin, foxy-looking boy who ought to have been at school. He took in the child and his injury in a single grimace, the grimace of someone who gets work when he does not expect it. He took a rifle from the nearest guard and stuck it in the ground, bayonet first. To the deserter, the whole scene was moving round and round in large ellipses. A poor show if the child simply died on them, as he probably would, and he himself had pawned his own skin by going to a military post. Presently they'd begin asking for bloody papers—at present they still regarded him as a human being, but when he hadn't the necessary certificate of humanity—bang! At all events, it was important not to faint. He lurched up against one of the two sentries, the man whose gun had been requisitioned, was caught, and found himself sitting on the ground. Cocoa was being poured into him, and as it went down, feeling, to his throat, as dry as sand, he could see an amber-coloured bottle, trailing red pipe, suspended from the

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upright rifle, and being connected to the child's arm. He managed to say to the sentry, "Fifty more of them, down there—a troop train went up." This went from mouth to mouth. There were signs of activity in the huts. An engine started up, and a motor bus on railway wheels, marked with red crosses, was brought out of a shed at the end of a siding. The foxy-faced medical officer got up. Now for it—"Can I see your papers?" He fished, automatically, handed over the dead sergeant's papers, realised that that made things slightly worse, but did not care. He was warm and full of cocoa—they could shoot him later. The officer looked solemnly at each page of the little book, at the photograph of a man slightly more than a foot taller than this exhausted scarecrow, closed the book and handed it back.

"Go in and get some stew. Then you'd better get back to your farm. I will see that you're mentioned for this—how far back did you say the train was?"

He got the stew, a warm ocean of it, and a cigarette from the sentry-nursemaid who dispensed it. He could not see the child as he walked out, an hour later, and the bus-ambulance had gone. The foxy man was sitting on a post, smoking. He raised a hand to the newly-created farmer and said, with meaning, "Good farming. F . . . this whole bloody business." The elderly man went through the ring of wire into the wood.

The major who came down with a medical team as soon as the dressing station filled with casualties from the train complimented the deserter in his absence. Then as an after thought he said, "I suppose you saw his papers?" "Local farmer," said the medical officer. They never spoke of him again.

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Meng Tzu's Song

The sparrows gleaning gutters
Kick and shuffle the horsehair,
And the simple wind that stirs
Their feathers stirs my hair.

How can I know, now forty
Years have shuffled my shoulders
Whether my mind is steady
Or quakes as the wind stirs?

Because one sparrow, running
On the old wind-ruts can be
Turned by an unseen thing,
A small wind in the sky,

And changes, it sets me thinking;
Yet I know not if my mind
Is moved, or is but sinking
Alone to its own kind.

If my mind moves not in wind
Or other breaths, it is not
Strange; at forty the mind
Of Kao Tzu wavered not.

Lo, how is the kept wind let
Out to make trouble with me!
How can one remain not
Moving before his eye?

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One cultivates bravery
That the skin's hair not flinch
Nor the skin's frail eye flee
Nor the skin's blood blanch.

One is as the trodden inch
Of horse hair on the bare ground
At the market place: wrench
Nor kick wring from him sound.

Thinks he as though he were sand
Or horse-hair, should the stiff sword
Shave the strength of his mind
And stab away his word.

Thinks of defeat and blood,
All hairs blown from control,
The hands like hair in mud,
As though it mattered little.

How can the thin mind be able?
How put off quaking only,
Keeping all else, simple,
Even in wind steady?

The wind is stiff and is high.
Simple the wind. The open
Coat of horsehair on three
Sides flaps without passion.

—W. S. MERWIN

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The Present Situation of Art in Europe

HERBERT READ

LET US BEGIN this estimate of the present situation of art in Europe by contrasting the achievements of two decades. The first of these decades is the one we have just lived through—the years 1939-48. The other is chosen more arbitrarily, but it too includes a world war—the years 1909-18. The contrast is, as you will admit after a moment's reflection, a dramatic one. In the earlier decade art was everywhere in a ferment. In France the post-impressionist movement was developing the more explicit phases known as fauvism and cubism; in Italy there was the futurism of Marinetti and Severini, and the metaphysical school of Chirico and Carra; dadaism was born in Zurich and presently evolved into surrealism in France and Germany; in Germany and Scandinavia the expressionist school came into existence; in Russia Malevitch, Gabo, Pevsner and Tatlin launched the suprematist movement, to develop after the Revolution into constructivism; in Holland Mondrian and Van Doesburg were establishing the movement known as neo-plasticism; even England had a new movement—the vorticism of Wyndham Lewis.

It may be objected that there was nothing very healthy about this ferment—that it was a feverish state of nerves symptomatic of the social unrest which came to a head in the first World War. I have no wish to deny a certain connection between the social and economic condition of Europe in this decade and the art of this same period, but that is an intricate question into which I do not propose to enter at the moment. Any interaction of this

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kind cannot be isolated within decades, and I do not see any fundamental difference of a social kind between the two periods—
—at least, the differences due to social revolution might be assumed to favour the later decade. Let us ask rather what survives from the earlier agitated decade. We cannot claim finality of judgment, but year by year it becomes clearer that in the art of painting if in no other art, the unquestioned masterpieces of our epoch belong to that decade—the best works of Chirico, of Matisse, of Leger, of Braque and, I would say, of Picasso. It may be a prejudice of mine, but I know it is shared by other critics, who also believe that the genius of Picasso was never so clearly and so firmly revealed as in the canvases of his so-called "classical Cubist" period.

Twenty years pass and we were once more involved in preparations for war and war itself. A decade superficially similar to that of 1908-17 has followed and we can now look back on it as objectively as our despondency allows. What is quite obvious is that there has been no general ferment at all comparable to that of the earlier decade. Not a single new movement in art has been born, and the only new "ism" of any significance, existentialism, does not touch the plastic arts as yet. Great art, of course, does not need a theory or a movement to justify it. Indeed, after the ferment of the 'teens and 'twenties, it is conceivable, indeed probable, that the natural phase to follow is one of refinement, distillation, or what in more philosophical terms we might call a synthesis. Many younger artists today seem to be conscious of this necessary step, and in Paris in particular there is an apparent effort to retrace the paths of the past forty years, to plot a general direction, to advance again on an agreed point, profiting by the experiments and discoveries of the older generation. Admirable as much of this painting is—I am referring to the work of artists like Pignon, Manessier, Tal Coat, Gischia, etc. —it seems to me to suffer from the defects of deliberateness: it is cold, mechanical, and decidedly academic in spirit. I find more hope, because there is more enterprise, in the work of some of our young English painters. To them I shall come presently, but

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first let us consider the French situation, which is the situation of European art in general.

The modern movement in the arts which began round about 1908 was fundamentally revolutionary, and it affected all the arts —the prose of Joyce and the music of Stravinsky were as much a part of it as the paintings of Picasso or Klee. When I characterize this movement as *fundamentally revolutionary,* I attach a literal meaning to these well-worn words. There are two senses in which one can be revolutionary. One can set out with a definite aim—to replace a monarchy by a republic, for example—and if one achieves that aim, the revolution is complete, finished. One is no longer a revolutionary. But that is not the kind of revolutionary that Picasso was, or Klee, or Joyce—I am not so sure about Stravinsky. These painters and writers had no new constitution in their pockets; they did not know where they were going or what they might discover. They were quite sure about the sterility and rottenness of the academic standards which then prevailed everywhere, but they had no pre-conceived ideas about new standards. They were explorers, but they had no compass bearing. "The important thing in art," Picasso once said, "is not to seek, but to find," and that might be given as the motto of the whole movement. These artists projected themselves into the future, into the unknown, not knowing what they would find, relying on the concrete evidence of their senses to find a way to the genuine work of art.

It might be here remarked that this attitude was anything but idealistic—it was, in fact, very much the attitude now defended by Jean-Paul Sartre, on the philosophical and political plane, as existentialist. Sartre's philosophy is said to derive from Heidegger's philosophy, but to a considerable extent I believe it to be a philosophical synthesis based on the practical activity of modern art. It is not without significance that it is precisely in Paris, where the revolutionary attitude in art has prevailed so long, that this new philosophy has arisen. I said a few moments ago that existentialism is not concerned with the plastic arts; I am inclined

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to suggest now that it is for the very good reason that art has in this respect anticipated philosophy.

A revolutionary philosophy, Sartre has said, must be a philosophy of transcendence. In political philosophy this would seem to mean that we must regard any immediate revolutionary attitude as contingent because the system of values at any time current in a society is a reflection of the structure of that society and tends to preserve it. When a revolution has been carried through, a new situation then exists which demands a new revolutionary attitude, an attitude which was not conceivable in the pre-revolutionary situation. The new systems of values will be the expression of a structure of society which does not yet exist, but which must be anticipated in order that what *does* exist may be transcended. Sartre's revolutionary man, therefore, "must be a contingent being, unjustifiable but free, entirely immersed in the society that oppresses him, but capable of transcending this society by his efforts to change it."

The revolutionary artist of whom Picasso is the most convenient prototype is precisely such a contingent being, entirely immersed in his visible world, but making every effort to transcend the symbols which are conventionally used to represent this world. The revolutionary artist is born into a world of clichés, of stale images and signs which no longer pierce the consciousness to express reality. He therefore invents new symbols, perhaps a whole new symbolic system. Then the academicians come along and try to generalize his symbols, to conventionalize them, to make them good for all time. Many artists, once revolutionary, fall into the same contented frame of mind. We might not call them reactionaries, but in the ceaseless unfolding of existence, it is reactionary to stand still. Or, as Sartre puts it, the slightest human act must be construed as emanating from the future; therefore even the reactionary is oriented toward the future, since he is concerned with making a future which is identical with the past.

I think it will be obvious that between this conception of perpetual revolution and what is usually meant by a synthesis

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there exists a contradiction. There is no justification in modern philosophy, however, for regarding a synthesis as a stasis—as a full-stop. A synthesis is merely the meeting-place of two ideas, and from their conjunction arises a new idea. But each new idea is in its turn a thesis which merges into an endless dialectical chain, and the only finality is something we agree to call the Truth, which seems to recede with every step we take towards it.

With these considerations in mind, we should approach the whole conception of a synthesis of styles with a certain degree of caution, perhaps of scepticism. The desire for a synthesis of the arts is part of that general longing for social stability which is the natural reaction to any period of revolution. In effect, this is nothing but a more or less conscious determination to consolidate the power of a new social élite, and "classicism" is usually the catch-word for the cultural aspects of such a consolidation. The reactionary—the man who wants to make a future identical with the past—seeks to establish recognized standards of taste, an official type of art, an academic tradition which is universally taught and automatically accepted. From this point of view, the revolutionary art of the period can be transformed into the academic art of the period of consolidation.

Let us next observe that this work of synthesis in the arts is not attempted by the originators of the revolution. Some of these originators—Picasso, above all—have continued to display a restless revolutionary energy. Even when, as in the case of Paul Klee, for example, the development was restricted to a very personal idiom, it remained consistent—it did not attempt to compromise with a general tradition of contemporary art. No; the search for a synthesis is the work of epigoni, of second generation disciples and followers, and not of the masters of the modern movement. The masters themselves remain revolutionary, or become openly reactionary (Chirico, Derain).

The work of those artists who have remained revolutionary for a period of forty years must now be examined to see if we can detach any progressive elements. I have already admitted that in my own opinion the best work of Picasso, Braque, Leger, Chi-

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rico, and, I would add, Rouault, belongs to the past—to the decade of 1908-17. I do not in any way dismiss their later work, which is rich and diverse and makes for a cumulative effect which cannot be ignored. But the high peaks of their vast achievement lie in the distance.

I believe that in other cases the development has been more gradual and has been rising all the time to heights we cannot yet measure. But before I mention any names, I would like to recall certain historical trends within the period in question.

The modern movement in art has four main phases or divisions, which are most conveniently labelled Naturalism, Expressionism, Cubism and Surrealism. Naturalism does not come into question, though artists like Picasso and Matisse use a naturalistic style for particular purposes, and I do not deny that there have been very gifted naturalistic artists in our time. But in our present historical circumstances naturalism has no significance, and has contributed nothing to the development of modern consciousness, to the development of our specific sense of reality. Expressionism has been significant for the Nordic peoples of Europe, especially for Scandinavia and Germany, and I shall return to a consideration of its present status. But let us begin with Cubism, which has a certain chronological priority.

The cubism which was discovered and exploited for a few years by Picasso, Braque and Juan Gris was *analytical*. That is to say, it was directed to the revelation of an aesthetic aspect of the natural world, and it claimed, by reducing the appearance of objects to their significant forms, to tell us something about the essential nature of these objects. This method of painting was carried to its greatest perfection by Juan Gris, but he died in the middle of his career, and Picasso and Braque found the method too strict for their revolutionary aims. But cubism had contained within itself the seeds of a far stricter discipline, of which there were two aspects or divisions.

Analytical cubism, by reducing the natural appearance of objects to a structure of plane surfaces, easily suggested a further stage in which the plane surfaces were divorced from any de-

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pendence on the essence (essential Nature) of the object, and became an end in themselves. That is to say, the forms arrived at by the analysis of the structure say, of pears on a dish on a table, were *abstracted* and realised or appreciated as geometrical forms with their own proportions and colours. It became more and more difficult to recognize the objects from which the composition had originated, and finally an object was no longer taken as the source or origin of a composition: the composition was non-figurative from its inception, an invention of purely formal relationships. This non-figurative cubism had nothing in common with analytical cubism, and has been strongly repudiated by Picasso, for example, who maintains that all plastic art must necessarily proceed from a sensuous awareness of the natural world.

But non-figurative cubism—no longer calling itself cubism, but rather non-objective, or non-figurative art, more popularly *abstract* art, has had an extraordinary expansion, not only in Europe, but even in the United States, where abstract artists have proliferated in a manner which requires some explanation. This non-figurative offspring of cubism easily degenerates into a very precise and precious academicism. To balance forms, calculate proportions and harmonize colours can be an intellectual exercise rather than an act of creative imagination, and it is certainly, on this calculating intellectual level, no longer an activity which can be called revolutionary. It can be called other names—"escapist," for example, for it can be produced in an ivory tower. A more insidious danger is a tendency towards a merely decorative function, and this type of cubism has, indeed, been exploited by industry, and "cubist" wall-papers, "cubist" linoleum, "cubist" lamp shades and "cubist" electric fittings became a bourgeois fashion some ten or twenty years ago, and seem to have taken a permanent hold on certain markets—for the very good reason, perhaps, that geometrical designs are easier to produce by machinery than curved ones.

However, in spite of all this vulgarisation and academic fixation of abstract art, there exists a progressive front which cannot

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be so easily dismissed. It is found in its purest and most revolutionary form in the paintings and reliefs of Ben Nicholson. In Nicholson's work there has never been any question of academic fixation: he has advanced from experiment to experiment, always maintaining the vitality and naivety of an extremely sensitive artist, and avoiding any temptation to be satisfied with a purely decorative function. I know that this latter statement can be challenged—there are sensitive critics who, charmed by Nicholson's sensitive execution and his invariable good taste, are not only contented with such positive gifts, but declare that there is nothing else to seek behind the decorative facade. But there it is. It is difficult to define without a philosophical disquisition which would be out of place in this general survey, but certain forms have a universal significance—they "echo," as we might say, the basic structural forms of the physical universe, the "harmony of the spheres." Ben Nicholson's intuitions of form go far beyond any decorative arrangement of shapes and colours, and being intuitive they have nothing in common with the academic compositions of even such a considerable artist as Kandinsky. Kandinsky, for whose career and work I have a considerable respect, was not so pure an abstract artist as Ben Nicholson; he used his abstract forms to illustrate subjective themes. Behind his compositions there was always an "idea"—perhaps a philosophical idea or a musical idea—for which he tried to find the plastic equivalent. In Nicholson's case, as in the case of another pure abstractionist to whom Nicholson has always been allied, to whom, indeed, he would acknowledge a considerable debt, Piet Mondrian, there is no precedent idea. The idea is the form, the form the idea. The composition is conceived, *ab initio,* in plastic terms. It cannot be translated into any other language, and is not itself a translation from any other language.

This front of pure abstraction—of, we might also say, the concrete harmony of universal forms—has historical contacts and intimate relationships with another form of abstract art which we call constructivism. Constructivism is actually of independent origin; it developed from the movement known as Suprema-

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tism which was founded in Moscow in the year 1913, and architects and engineers had as much to do with its formulation as studio painters or sculptors. In 1920 as a result of a fierce debate involving the principles of marxism, dialectical materialism, socialist realism, and I know not what else, a group under the leadership of Gabo and his brother Antoine Pevsner seceded from the suprematist movement and established the constructivist movement. The price of their integrity was political exile, and it was in Germany (in Berlin and later at the Bauhaus in Dessau), in Paris (where Pevsner settled) and in London (where Gabo eventually came) that constructivism was developed as a revolutionary movement in the arts. The theoretical background of the movement is to a large extent identical with that of the abstractionists, but constructivism has always been in revolt against the whole conception of studio art, of the cabinet picture, the petty bourgeois longing for a nice painting to hang over the fire-place. Constructivism, as its name indicates, is closely allied to engineering, and it seeks to establish a non-figurative art which makes use of specifically contemporary materials —steel, plastics, aluminum—and which uses technical methods of construction. What we therefore get, in a typical construction of Gabo or Pevsner, is something which breaks away completely from the whole tradition of European academic art, with its canvases and gilt frames: we get a work of art which is more at home in a factory or on an airport than in an art gallery or a gentleman's residence. We get something so completely revolutionary that it requires a considerable readjustment of our faculties of perception to accept it as art at all. But none the less these constructions of Gabo and Pevsner, when we analyse them, are found to be as fundamentally aesthetic as the Parthenon. That is to say, in harmony and proportion they conform to the same fundamental universal laws as the art of the past. Their uniqueness, their revolutionary significance, lies in the extension which they exact in the perception and sensuous apprehension of these concrete physical phenomena.

I am now going to pass, rather abruptly, to a consideration of

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that other phase of contemporary art which, in the past thirty years, has developed phases of revolution and reaction: surrealism. Here the ground I tread on is full of pitfalls and booby-traps. I shall proceed cautiously.

Between the First Surrealist Manifesto of 1924 and the latest manifestation of surrealist activity, which was the Paris Exhibition of July 1947, the personnel of the surrealist movement suffered many changes, but one factor has remained permanent—the intellectual inspiration and integrity of André Breton. Breton has an analytical intelligence of the same order as Leonardo's—a curiosity of universal range which seeks the power which knowledge alone can give. That research has been directed in particular to the mystery of the human personality or psyche, and has inevitably led to an association with the revolutionary technique of psychological research which we owe to Freud. Applying Freudian methods to the problems of artistic creation, Breton evolved a theory and indeed a practice of aesthetic automatism which is the essential feature of surrealism.

The traditional canons of classical aesthetics are abandoned—harmony, proportion, rhythm are treated as at best incidental features of fundamental psychic manifestations, and as features which are by no means essential to the creation of a work of art. The work of art, it is said, derives its power from the unconscious—more particularly from that deepest layer of the unconscious which the Freudians call the Id. Art, therefore, whether in the form of poetry or painting, even architecture, is potent and aesthetically effective (the surrealists do not claim to be pleasing) to the extent that it projects significant symbols from the Unconscious. Latterly it has been recognized that the proliferation of discrete or unconnected symbols is not fully effective—it is, indeed, merely confusing. For this reason there has been an increasing emphasis on the organization of symbols into effective patterns or myths. The object of surrealism might now be described as the creation of a new mythology.

I believe that from the beginning an exclusive devotion to a theory of aesthetic automatism was a mistake. In the first place

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it involves a surrender of intellectual freedom—for what, in a personal sense is creative or responsible in a purely automatic projection of the images of the unconscious, which in themselves may be collective in their origin rather than personal? But in the second place, the process of automatism is not essentially artistic at all, but, if you like, scientific. Art, in the fundamentally revolutionary sense which I have defined, always involves an original act of creation—the invention of an objective reality which previously had no existence. The projection of a symbol or image from the unconscious is not an act of creation in that sense: it is merely the transfer of an existing object from one sphere to another—from the mental sphere, for example, to the verbal or plastic sphere. The essential function of art is revealed in a co-ordination of images (whether unconscious or perceptual does not matter) into an effective pattern. The art is in the pattern, which is a personal intuition of the artist, and not in the imagery. Imagery can be released by hypnosis, by intoxication, and in dreams; but it does not constitute aesthetic expression, or art, until it has been given expressive form. The myth is not necessarily such a form. Myths have usually been evolved in the collective unconscious of peoples, and only slowly precipitated in the form of narratives. It is only when such narratives are shaped into epic poetry that they become works of art. I do not believe that a myth can be synthetically created out of symbols automatically projected from the unconscious of a few individuals associated in a movement like surrealism; but even if it could be created in this way, it would still have to be conceived in epic form before it could claim to be a work of art.

I will not go so far as to say that this particular phase of surrealism has reached a dead end; artists such as Breton, Max Ernst, Tanguy, Miró, Matta and Lam are full of resource, and often they are artists in spite of their theories. Miró, for example, has never been a doctrinaire surreálist, and his paintings risk being accepted for their beauty rather than for their symbolic significance. I would say the same of Matta and Wilfredo Lam, in whose work a free revolutionary energy is always manifest.

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The theory of psycho-analysis—in its Jungian rather than its Freudian elaboration—has revealed the presence in the psyche not only of significant symbols of a figurative kind, but also of more abstract archetypal forms. Jung has shown, for example, how throughout history the unconscious has repeatedly expressed itself in a formal pattern which he calls the *mandala,* a more or less complicated design divided into quadripartite sections. Other forms and shapes are biologically significant—the phallus, for example. But the world is, as it were, haunted by significant forms. Our attention is held by the contour of a particular hill, by the shape of a rock or a tree-stump or a pebble we pick up on the beach. These shapes appeal to us, not because of any superficial beauty, any sensuous texture or colour, but because they are archetypal. That is to say, they are the forms which matter assumes under the operation of physical laws. When these forms are mathematically regular, as in the convolutions of a shell or the structure of a quartz crystal, we can easily account for their appeal under the laws of proportion and harmony. But most of these shapes are more complex and irregular, and we are not consciously aware of the processes which have determined their outline or mass. The beauty of a leaf, a flower or a seed is obvious: the beauty of a bone, a fungus, or even of the solution of a mathematical problem is not so obvious. But the appeal of the unknown is often stronger than the appeal of the known; it is strong because it is mysterious, because it has not been dissected and analysed. We invest such forms with our own feelings, of sympathy or of fear. This possibility of identity with an inanimate object is the basis of primitive animism. We used to accuse the savage of worshipping "stocks and stones," but now we recognise that these stocks and stones may have significant form.

It is in this direction that one phase of European art has continued to advance during recent years. Two artists in particular have explored this superreal territory, this world of animistic forms—Picasso in painting and Henry Moore in sculpture. But one must mention also the work of Lipchitz, of Laurens, or Arp.

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. . . If I now mention Henry Moore's work in more detail, it is not only because it is more familiar to me, but also because I believe that it has a more consistent direction than the work of other artists exploring this territory. Its consistency is perhaps due to certain limitations—an obsession, for example, with female forms, with the symbolic forms of fertility and gestation. But such limitations are often characteristics of the major artist and are certainly no argument against the stature of any particular artist. The life of art lies in the transformation of forms, as a French philosopher of art has said, and this life can be manifested within the infinite variations which spring from a single central theme. Moore has shown in his war sketches, in his drawings of coal miners, and in his "Madonna and Child," that he can, if necessary, depart from his central theme. But in doing so he still expresses himself with a formal simplicity which derives its significance from a primitive or animistic quality of the forms themselves. I believe the same is true of many of Picasso's recent paintings, which have a family likeness to the masks used in the magic rites of certain primitive peoples.

Finally, I come to the expressionist movement, which has been the typical art movement during these years in Scandinavia, Germany and Austria, and has hitherto left Western Europe untouched. The original source of the modern expressionist movement is undoubtedly Van Gogh, a Dutchman, but it gained general significance with the work of Edvard Munch, a Norwegian. Its exponents, in the period we are now considering, have been Germans like Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, and George Grosz; Belgians like De Smet, Permeke and Fritz van den Berghe; and, lastly but not least, a Czech like Oskar Kokoschka. Rouault, in his independent way, belongs to this movement, and so does an Eastern European Jew like Chagall. But essentially the movement has geographic roots: it is the art of Northern Europe, and the typical work of artists of the past, like Mathias Grunewald and Jerome Bosch, is fundamentally expressionist.

Expressionism, briefly, may be defined as a form of art which gives primacy to the artist's emotional reactions to experience.

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The artist tries to depict, not the objective reality of the world, but the subjective reality of the feelings which objects and events arouse in his psyche, or self. It is an art which cares very little for conventional notions of beauty: it can be impressively tragic, and sometimes excessively neurotic or sentimental. But it is never merely pretty, never intellectually sterile.

During the period we are considering, something like an iron curtain has existed between the expressionist art of Northern Europe and the movements concentrated in Paris. Now, partly as a result of the dispersion caused by Nazism and the war, expressionist influences have been spreading. Kokoschka has been in England, Beckmann and Chagall in the United States, and almost every country has had its refugee expressionist painters. Independently of these direct influences, I think that northern countries, cut off from the propaganda of Paris, have been discovering the congeniality of expressionism—they suddenly recognize in it their natural mode of expression, their pictorial language. Whatever the reason, there is certainly a strong expressionist element in the work of the younger school of painters in Great Britain—and significantly, the most energetic members of this group come from the north—from Scotland. I am referring to Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde. But an expressionist element will be found in the work of many other young British painters today.

That concludes my survey of the present situation of art in Europe. Perhaps the activity of some of our younger painters goes some way to soften the extreme contrast which I drew at the beginning between the two decades, 1909-18 and 1939-48. But though I personally find much that is stimulating and fresh, not only in the recent work of artists of the older generation such as Picasso and Leger, but also in the work of new and comparatively unknown artists like Colquhoun and MacBryde, Craxton and Vaughan, nevertheless, in historical perspective, there can be no doubt where revolutionary energy has been most manifest. The work of the younger men is still but the prolonged reverbera-

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tions of the explosions of thirty or forty years ago. The general effect is a diminuendo.

I shall perhaps be accused of praising my own generation at the expense of an uprising generation. Apart from the fact that I really stand between the two generations, that is not my real intention. My aim has been to represent a consistent revolutionary attitude. If a new generation arises to dethrone the giants of the past, no one will give it a warmer welcome than I. My whole reading of the history of art tells me that art, to reverse the usual statement, changes all the time that it remains art. Art is never transfixed, never stagnant. It is a fountain rising and falling under the varying pressure of social conditions, blown into an infinite sequence of forms by the winds of destiny.

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Anger

Never so much trouble in the spirit as when
Jealousy nigrates mobility to a cloud,
Cloud to pillar can burn and blacken.

Pillar of cloud can smoulder and harden,
Hold up the temple of the world, controlling
All that trouble from one local yard.

Dissolve to vine and life from such a wrath,
From such a travelling tower of wrath as you see,
My angry self, your self to be.

Elevation

God in the high fog comes closer down
And gathers to his own
To hear what they will say
Upon a semi-judgment day.

Most mutter because it will not rain; the tops
Of the toughest trees wither in the saffron light like the crops,
And pure humidity collects
In the interstices of the soul more than the soul suspects.

So it's a lone God hears no talk about,
Even to doubt,
But all going murmuring in their own beards and breasts
Their dark expectations and unrests.

It will require a lifting weather
To bring the judge and his judgments together:
Before the uplooking soul will slip
Into a cerulean companionship.

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Autumnal

We have lost so many leaves
    in loss, loss, loss
Out of the sky,
What shall we do for shelter to live by?

Not roof shelter, but leaf shelter
    the tentative
Crosswise cover
Which a thousand light ideas give.

Retire under somebody's constructed rafters, or be grieved
    that a truthful brain
Exists under a truthful sky
With no palaver between.

Shift

Many of the bodies arose at the graveyard shift
From the literal graveyard as from the hot beds
Of the federal housing project; they bent their backs
To the war effort.

Many sinews snapped, the grandmothers
Played out soonest in the limited moonlight,
Nor was a headstone any less heavy
Upon younger necks strained and retired.

The impulsion of the people's will clearly
Had got down six foot underground.
But whether any argument got down there
Mortality has not ascertained.

—JOSEPHINE MILES

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Technique as Discovery

MARK SCHORER

1

MODERN CRITICISM, through its exacting scrutiny of literary texts, has demonstrated with finality that in art beauty and truth are indivisible and one. The Keatsian overtones of these terms are mitigated and an old dilemma solved if for beauty we substitute form, and for truth, content. We may, without risk of loss, narrow them even more, and speak of technique and subject matter. Modern criticism has shown us that to speak of content as such is not to speak of art at all, but of experience; and that it is only when we speak of the *achieved* content, the form, the work of art as a work of art, that we speak as critics. The difference between content, or experience, and achieved content, or art, is technique.

When we speak of technique, then, we speak of nearly everything. For technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and, finally, of evaluating it. And surely it follows that certain techniques are sharper tools than others, and will discover more; that the writer capable of the most exacting technical scrutiny of his subject matter, will produce works with the most satisfying content, works with thickness and resonance, works which reverberate, works with maximum meaning.

We are no longer able to regard as seriously intended criticism of poetry which does not assume these generalizations; but the case for fiction has not yet been established. The novel is still read as though its content has some value in itself, as though the subject matter of fiction has greater or lesser value in itself, and as though technique were not a primary but a supplementary element, capable perhaps of not unattractive embellishments upon

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the surface of the subject, but hardly of its essence. Or technique is thought of in blunter terms from those which one associates with poetry, as such relatively obvious matters as the arrangement of events to create plot; or, within plot, of suspense and climax; or as the means of revealing character motivation, relationship, and development; or as the use of point of view, but point of view as some nearly arbitrary device for the heightening of dramatic interest through the narrowing or broadening of perspective upon the material, rather than as a means toward the positive definition of theme. As for the resources of language, these, somehow, we almost never think of as a part of the technique of fiction—language as used to create a certain texture and tone which in themselves state and define themes and meanings; or language, the counters of our ordinary speech, as forced, through conscious manipulation, into all those larger meanings which our ordinary speech almost never intends. Technique in fiction, all this is a way of saying, we somehow continue to regard as merely a means to organizing material which is "given" rather than as the means of exploring and defining the values in an area of experience which, for the first time *then,* are being given.

Is fiction still regarded in this odd, divided way because it is really less tractable before the critical suppositions which now seem inevitable to poetry? Let us look at some examples: two well-known novels of the past, both by writers who may be described as "primitive," although their relative innocence of technique is of a different sort—Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights;* and three well-known novels of this century—*Tono Bungay,* by a writer who claimed to eschew technique; *Sons and Lovers,* by a novelist who, because his ideal of subject matter ("the poetry of the immediate present") led him at last into the fallacy of spontaneous and unchangeable composition, in effect eschewed technique; and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* by a novelist whose practice made claims for the supremacy of technique beyond those made by anyone in the past or by anyone else in this century.

Technique in fiction is, of course, all those obvious forms of

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it which are usually taken to be the whole of it, and many others; but for the present purposes, let it be thought of in two respects particularly: the uses to which language, as language, is put to express the quality of the experience in question; and the uses of point of view not only as a mode of dramatic delimitation, but more particularly, of thematic definition. Technique is really what T. S. Eliot means by "convention"—any selection, structure, or distortion, any form or rhythm imposed upon the world of action; by means of which—it should be added—our apprehension of the world of action is enriched or renewed. In this sense, everything is technique which is not the lump of experience itself, and one cannot properly say that a writer has no technique or that he eschews technique, for, being a writer, he cannot do so. We can speak of good and bad technique, of adequate and inadequate, of technique which serves the novel's purpose, or disserves.

2

In the prefatory remarks to *Moll Flanders*, Defoe tells us that he is not writing fiction at all, but editing the journals of a woman of notorious character, and rather to instruct us in the necessities and the joys of virtue than to please us. We do not, of course, take these professions seriously, since nothing in the conduct of the narrative indicates that virtue is either more necessary or more enjoyable than vice. On the contrary, we discover that Moll turns virtuous only after a life of vice has enabled her to do so with security; yet it is precisely for this reason that Defoe's profession of didactic purpose has interest. For the actual morality which the novel enforces is the morality of any commercial culture, the belief that virtue pays—in worldly goods. It is a morality somewhat less than skin deep, having no relation to motives arising from a sense of good and evil, least of all, of evil-*in*-good, but exclusively from the presence or absence of food, drink, linen, damask, silver, and time-pieces. It is the morality of measurement, and without in the least intending it, *Moll Flanders* is our classic revelation of the mercantile mind: the morality of measurement,

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which Defoe has completely neglected to measure. He fails not only to evaluate this material in his announced way, but to evaluate it at all. His announced purpose is, we admit, a pious humbug, and he meant us to read the book as a series of scandalous events; and thanks to his inexhaustible pleasure in excess and exaggeration, this element in the book continues to amuse us. Long before the book has been finished, however, this element has also become an absurdity; but not half the absurdity as that which Defoe did not intend at all—the notion that Moll could live a rich and full life of crime, and yet, repenting, emerge spotless in the end. The point is, of course, that she has no moral being, nor has the book any moral life. Everything is external. Everything can be weighed, measured, handled, paid for in gold, or expiated by a prison term. To this, the whole texture of the novel testifies: the bolts of goods, the inventories, the itemized accounts, the landlady's bills, the lists, the ledgers: all this, which taken together comprises what we call Defoe's method of circumstantial realism.

He did not come upon that method by any deliberation: it represents precisely his own world of value, the importance of external circumstance to Defoe. The point of view of Moll is indistinguishable from the point of view of her creator. We discover the meaning of the novel (at unnecessary length, without economy, without emphasis, with almost none of the distortions or the advantages of art) in spite of Defoe, not because of him. Thus the book is not the true chronicle of a disreputable female, but the true allegory of an improverished soul—the author's; not an anatomy of the criminal class, but of the middle class. And we read it as an unintended comic revelation of self and of a social mode. Because he had no adequate resources of technique to separate himself from his material, thereby to discover and to define the meanings of his material, his contribution is not to fiction but to the history of fiction, and to social history.

The situation in *Wuthering Heights* is at once somewhat the same and yet very different. Here, too, the whole novel turns upon itself, but this time to its estimable advantage; here, too,

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is a revelation of what is perhaps the author's secret world of value, but this time, through what may be an accident of technique, the revelation is meaningfully accomplished. Emily Bronte may merely have stumbled upon the perspectives which define the form and the theme of her book. Whether she knew from the outset, or even at the end, what she was doing, we may doubt; but what she did and did superbly we can see.

We can assume, without at all becoming involved in the author's life but merely from the tone of somnambulistic excess which is generated by the writing itself, that this world of monstrous passion, of dark and gigantic emotional and nervous energy, is for the author, or was in the first place, a world of ideal value; and that the book sets out to persuade us of the moral magnificence of such unmoral passion. We are, I think, expected, in the first place, to take at their own valuation these demonic beings, Heathcliff and Cathy: as special creatures, set apart from the cloddish world about them by their heightened capacity for feeling, set apart, even, from the ordinary objects of human passion as, in their transcendental, sexless relationship, they identify themselves with an uncompromising landscape and cosmic force. Yet this is absurd, as much of the detail that surrounds it ("Other dogs lurked in other recesses") is absurd. The novelist Emily Bronte had to discover these absurdities to the girl Emily; her technique had to evaluate them for what they were, so that we are persuaded that it is not Emily who is mistaken in her estimate of her characters, but they who are mistaken in their estimate of themselves. The theme of the moral magnificence of unmoral passion is an impossible theme to sustain, and what interests us is that it was device—and this time, mere, mechanical device—which taught Emily Bronte that, the needs of her temperament to the contrary, all personal longing and reverie to the contrary, perhaps—that this was indeed not at all what her material must mean as art. Technique objectifies.

To lay before us the full character of this passion, to show us how it first comes into being and then comes to dominate the world about it and the life that follows upon it, Emily Bronte

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gives her material a broad scope in time, lets it, in fact, cut across three generations. And to manage material which is so extensive, she must find a means of narration, points of view, which can encompass that material, and, in her somewhat crude concept of motive, justify its telling. So she chooses a foppish traveller who stumbles into this world of passionate violence, a traveller representing the thin and conventional emotional life of the far world of fashion, who wishes to hear the tale: and for her teller she chooses, almost inevitably, the old family retainer who knows everything, a character as conventional as the other, but this one representing not the conventions of fashion, but the conventions of the humblest moralism. What has happened is, first, that she has chosen as her narrative perspective those very elements, conventional emotion and conventional morality, which her hero and heroine are meant to transcend with such spectacular magnificence; and second, that she has permitted this perspective to operate throughout a long period of time. And these two elements compel the novelist to see what her unmoral passions come to. Moral magnificence? Not at all; rather, a devastating spectacle of human waste; ashes. For the time of the novel is carried on long enough to show Heathcliff at last an emptied man, burned out by his fever ragings, exhausted and will-less, his passion meaningless at last. And it goes even a little further, to Lockwood, the fop, in the graveyard, sententiously contemplating headstones. Thus in the end the triumph is all on the side of the cloddish world, which survives.

Perhaps not all on that side. For, like Densher at the end of *The Wings of the Dove*, we say, and surely Hareton and the second Cathy say, "We shall never be again as we were!" But there is more point in observing that a certain body of materials, a girl's romantic daydreams, have, through the most conventional devices of fiction, been pushed beyond their inception in fancy to their meanings, their conception as a written book—that they, that is, are not at all as they were.

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Technique alone objectifies the materials of art; hence technique alone evaluates those materials. This is the axiom which demonstrates itself so devastatingly whenever a writer declares, under the urgent sense of the importance of his materials (whether these are autobiography, or social ideas, or personal passions)—whenever such a writer declares that he cannot linger with technical refinements. That art will not tolerate such a writer H. G. Wells handsomely proves. His enormous literary energy included no respect for the techniques of his medium, and his medium takes its revenge upon his bumptiousness. "I have never taken any very great pains about writing. I am outside the hierarchy of conscious and deliberate writers altogether. I am the absolute antithesis of Mr. James Joyce. . . . Long ago, living in close conversational proximity to Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and Mr. Ford Madox Hueffer, I escaped from under their immense artistic preoccupations by calling myself a journalist." Precisely. And he escaped—he disappeared—from literature into the annals of an era.

Yet what confidence! "Literature," Wells said, "is not jewelry, it has quite other aims than perfection, and the more one thinks of 'how it is done' the less one gets it done. These critical indulgences lead along a fatal path, away from every natural interest towards a preposterous emptiness of technical effort, a monstrous egotism of artistry, of which the later work of Henry James is the monumental warning. 'It,' the subject, the thing or the thought, has long since disappeared in these amazing works; nothing remains but the way it has been 'manipulated.' " Seldom has a literary theorist been so totally wrong; for what we learn as James grows for us and Wells disappears, is that without what he calls "manipulation," there *is* no "it," no "subject" in art. There is again only social history.

The virtue of the modern novelist—from James and Conrad down—is not only that he pays so much attention to his medium, but that, when he pays most, he discovers through it a new sub-

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ject matter, and a greater one. Under the "immense artistic preoccupations" of James and Conrad and Joyce, the form of the novel changed, and with the technical change, analogous changes took place in substance, in point of view, in the whole conception of fiction. And the final lesson of the modern novel is that technique is not the secondary thing that it seemed to Wells, some external machination, a mechanical affair, but a deep and primary operation; not only that technique *contains* intellectual and moral implications, but that it *discovers* them. For a writer like Wells, who wished to give us the intellectual and the moral history of our times, the lesson is a hard one: it tells us that the order of intellect and the order of morality do not exist at all, in art, except as they are organized in the order of art.

Wells's ambitions were very large. "Before we have done, we will have all life within the scope of the novel." But that is where life already is, within the scope of the novel; where it needs to be brought is into novels. In Wells we have all the important topics in life, but no good novels. He was not asking too much of art, or asking that it include more than it happily can; he was not asking anything of it—as art, which is all that it can give, and that is everything.

A novel like *Tono Bungay,* generally thought to be Wells's best, is therefore instructive. "I want to tell—*myself,*" says George, the hero, "and my impressions of the thing as a whole"—the thing as a whole being the collapse of traditional British institutions in the twentieth century. George "tells himself" in terms of three stages in his life which have rough equivalents in modern British social history, and this is, to be sure, a plan, a framework; but it is the framework of Wells's abstract thinking, not of his craftsmanship, and the primary demand which one makes of such a book as this, that means be discovered whereby the dimensions of the hero contain the experiences he recounts, is never met. The novelist flounders through a series of literary imitations—from an early Dickensian episode, through a kind of Shavian interlude, through a Conradian episode, to a Jules Vernes vision at the end. The significant failure is in that end, and in the way that

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it defeats not only the entire social analysis of the bulk of the novel, but Wells's own ends as a thinker. For at last George finds a purpose in science. "I decided that in power and knowledge lay the salvation of my life, the secret that would fill my need; that to these things I would give myself."

But science, power and knowledge, are summed up at last in a destroyer. As far as one can tell Wells intends no irony, although he may here have come upon the essence of the major irony in modern history. The novel ends in a kind of meditative rhapsody which denies every value that the book had been aiming toward. For of all the kinds of social waste which Wells has been describing, this is the most inclusive, the final waste. Thus he gives us in the end not a novel, but a hypothesis; not an individual destiny, but a theory of the future; and not his theory of the future, but a nihilistic vision quite opposite from everything that he meant to represent. With a minimum of attention to the virtues of technique, Wells might still not have written a good novel; but he would at any rate have established a point of view and a tone which would have told us what he meant.

To say what one means in art is never easy, and the more intimately one is implicated in one's material, the more difficult it is. If, besides, one commits fiction to a therapeutic function which is to be operative not on the audience but on the author, declaring, as D. H. Lawrence did, that "One sheds one's sicknesses in books, repeats and presents again one's emotions to be master of them," the difficulty is vast. It is an acceptable theory only with the qualification that technique, which objectifies, is under no other circumstances so imperative. For merely to repeat one's emotions, merely to look into one's heart and write, is also merely to repeat the round of emotional bondage. If our books are to be exercises in self-analysis, then technique must—and alone can—take the place of the absent analyst.

Lawrence, in the relatively late Introduction to his *Collected Poems*, made that distinction of the amateur between his "real" poems and his "composed" poems, between the poems which expressed his demon directly and created their own form "willy-

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nilly," and the poems which, through the hocus pocus of technique, he spuriously put together and could, if necessary, revise. His belief in a "poetry of the immediate present," poetry in which nothing is fixed, static, or final, where all is shimmeriness and impermanence and vitalistic essence, arose from this mistaken notion of technique. And from this notion, an unsympathetic critic like D. S. Savage can construct a case which shows Lawrence driven "concurrently to the dissolution of personality and the dissolution of art." The argument suggests that Lawrence's early, crucial novel, *Sons and Lovers,* is another example of meanings confused by an impatience with technical resources.

The novel has two themes: the crippling effects of a mother's love on the emotional development of her son; and the "split" between kinds of love, physical and spiritual, which the son develops, the kinds represented by two young women, Clara and Miriam. The two themes should, of course, work together, the second being, actually, the result of the first: this "split" is the "crippling." So one would expect to see the novel developed, and so Lawrence, in his famous letter to Edward Garnett, where he says that Paul is left at the end with the "drift towards death," apparently thought he had developed it. Yet in the last few sentences of the novel, Paul rejects his desire for extinction and turns towards "the faintly humming, glowing town," to life—as nothing in his previous history persuades us that he could unfalteringly do.

The discrepancy suggests that the book may reveal certain confusions between intention and performance.

The first of these is the contradiction between Lawrence's explicit characterizations of the mother and father and his tonal evaluations of them. It is a problem not only of style (of the contradiction between expressed moral epithets and the more general texture of the prose which applies to them) but of point of view. Morel and Lawrence are never separated, which is a way of saying that Lawrence maintains for himself in this book the confused attitude of his character. The mother is a "proud, *honorable* soul," but the father has a "small, *mean* head." This is the

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sustained contrast; the epithets are characteristic of the whole; and they represent half of Lawrence's feelings. But what is the other half? Which of these characters is given his real sympathy—the hard, self-righteous, aggressive, demanding mother who comes through to us, or the simple, direct, gentle, downright, fumbling, ruined father? There are two attitudes here. Lawrence (and Morel) loves his mother, but he also hates her for compelling his love; and he hates his father with the true Freudian jealousy, but he also loves him for what he is in himself, and he sympathizes more deeply with him because his wholeness has been destroyed by the mother's domination, just as his, Lawrence-Morel's, has been.

This is a psychological tension which disrupts the form of the novel and obscures its meaning, because neither the contradiction in style nor the confusion in point of view is made to right itself. Lawrence is merely repeating his emotions, and he avoids an austerer technical scrutiny of his material because it would compel him to master them. He would not let the artist be stronger than the man.

The result is that, at the same time that the book condemns the mother, it justifies her; at the same time that it shows Paul's failure, it offers rationalizations which place the failure elsewhere. The handling of the girl, Miriam, if viewed closely, is pathetic in what it signifies for Lawrence, both as man and artist. For Miriam is made the mother's scape-goat, and in a different way from the way that she was in life. The central section of the novel is shot through with alternate statements as to the source of the difficulty: Paul is unable to love Miriam wholly, and Miriam can love only his spirit. The contradictions appear sometimes within single paragraphs, and the point of view is never adequately objectified and sustained to tell us which is true. The material is never seen as material; the writer is caught in it exactly as firmly as he was caught in his experience of it. "That's how women are with me," said Paul. "They want me like mad, but they don't want to belong to me." So he might have said, and

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believed it; but at the end of the novel, Lawrence is still saying that, and himself believing it.

For the full history of this technical failure, one must read *Sons and Lovers* carefully and then learn the history of the manuscript from the book called *D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record,* by one E. T., who was Miriam in life. The basic situation is clear enough. The first theme—the crippling effects of the mother's love—is developed right through to the end; and then suddenly, in the last few sentences, turns on itself, and Paul gives himself to life, not death. But all the way through, the insidious rationalizations of the second theme have crept in to destroy the artistic coherence of the work. A "split" would occur in Paul; but as the split is treated, it is superimposed upon rather than developed in support of the first theme. It is a rationalization made from it. If Miriam is made to insist on spiritual love, the meaning and the power of theme one are reduced; yet Paul's weakness is disguised. Lawrence could not separate the investigating analyst, who must be objective, from Lawrence, the subject of the book; and the sickness was not healed, the emotion not mastered, the novel not perfected. All this, and the character of a whole career, would have been altered if Lawrence had allowed his technique to discover the fullest meaning of his subject.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, like *Tono Bungay* and *Sons and Lovers,* is autobiographical, but unlike these it analyzes its material rigorously, and it defines the value and the quality of its experience not by appended comment or moral epithet, but by the texture of the style. The theme of *A Portrait,* a young artist's alienation from his environment, is explored and evaluated through three different styles and methods as Stephen Dedalus moves from childhood through boyhood into maturity. The opening pages are written in something like the stream of consciousness of *Ulysses,* as the environment impinges directly on the consciousness of the infant and the child, a strange, opening world which the mind does not yet subject to questioning, selection, or judgment. But this style changes very soon, as the boy begins to explore his surroundings, and as his sensuous experience

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of the world is enlarged, it takes on heavier and heavier rhythms and a fuller and fuller body of sensuous detail, until it reaches a crescendo of romantic opulence in the emotional climaxes which mark Stephen's rejection of domestic and religious values. Then gradually the style subsides into the austerer intellectuality of the final sections, as he defines to himself the outlines of the artistic task which is to usurp his maturity.

A highly self-conscious use of style and method defines the quality of experience in each of these sections, and, it is worth pointing out in connection with the third and concluding section, the style and method evaluate the experience. What has happened to Stephen is, of course, a progressive alienation from the life around him as he progressed in his initiation into it, and by the end of the novel, the alienation is complete. The final portion of the novel, fascinating as it may be for the developing aesthetic creed of Stephen-Joyce, is peculiarly bare. The life experience was not bare, as we know from *Stephen Hero;* but Joyce is forcing technique to comment. In essence, Stephen's alienation is a denial of the human environment; it is a loss; and the austere discourse of the final section, abstract and almost wholly without sensuous detail or strong rhythm, tells us of that loss. It is a loss so great that the texture of the notation-like prose here suggests that the end is really all an illusion, that when Stephen tells us and himself that he is going forth to forge in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race, we are to infer from the very quality of the icy, abstract void he now inhabits, the implausibility of his aim. For *Ulysses* does not create the conscience of the race; it creates our consciousness.

In the very last two or three paragraphs of the novel, the style changes once more, reverts from the bare, notative kind to the romantic prose of Stephen's adolescence. "Away! Away! The spell of arms and voices: the white arms of roads, their promise of close embraces and the black arms of tall ships that stand against the moon, their tale of distant nations. They are held out to say: We are alone—come." Might one not say that the austere ambition is founded on adolescent longing? That the excessive

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intellectual severity of one style is the counterpart of the excessive lyric relaxation of the other? And that the final passage of *A Portrait* punctuates the illusory nature of the whole ambition?

For *Ulysses* does not create a conscience. Stephen, in *Ulysses,* is a little older, and gripped now by guilt, but he is still the cold young man divorced from the human no less than the institutional environment. The environment of urban life finds a separate embodiment in the character of Bloom, and Bloom is as lost as Stephen, though touchingly groping for moorings. Each of the two is weakened by his inability to reach out, or to do more than reach out to the other. Here, then, is the theme again, more fully stated, as it were in counterpoint.

But if Stephen is not much older, Joyce is. He is older as an artist not only because he can create and lavish his Godlike pity on a Leopold Bloom, but also because he knows now what both Stephen and Bloom mean, and *how much,* through the most brilliant technical operation ever made in fiction, they can be made to mean. Thus *Ulysses,* through the imaginative force which its techniques direct, is like a pattern of concentric circles, with the immediate human situation at its center, this passing on and out to the whole dilemma of modern life, this passing on and out beyond that to a vision of the cosmos, and this to the mythical limits of our experience. If we read *Ulysses* with more satisfaction than any other novel of this century, it is because its author held an attitude toward technique and the technical scrutiny of subject matter which enabled him to order, within a single work and with superb coherence, the greatest amount of our experience.

4

In the United States during the last twenty-five years, we have had many big novels but few good ones. A writer like James T. Farrell apparently assumes that by endless redundancy in the description of the surface of American Life, he will somehow write a book with the scope of *Ulysses.* Thomas Wolfe apparently assumed that by the mere disgorging of the raw material of his

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experience he would give us at last our epic. But except in a physical sense, these men have hardly written novels at all.

The books of Thomas Wolfe were, of course, journals, and the primary role of his publisher in transforming these journals into the semblance of novels is notorious. For the crucial act of the artist, the unique act which is composition, a sympathetic editorial blue pencil and scissors were substituted. The result has excited many people, especially the young, and the ostensibly critical have observed the prodigal talent with the wish that it might have been controlled. Talent there was, if one means by talent inexhaustible verbal energy, excessive response to personal experience, and a great capacity for auditory imitativeness, yet all of this has nothing to do with the novelistic quality of the written result; until the talent is controlled, the material organized, the content achieved, there is simply the man and his life. It remains to be demonstrated that Wolfe's conversations were any less interesting as novels than his books, which is to say that his books are without interest as novels. As with Lawrence, our response to the books is determined, not by their qualities as novels, but by our response to him and his qualities as a temperament.

This is another way of saying that Thomas Wolfe never really knew what he was writing *about*. Of Time and the River is merely a euphemism for Of a Man and his Ego. It is possible that had his conception of himself and of art included an adequate respect for technique and the capacity to pursue it, Wolfe would have written a great novel on his true subject—the dilemma of romantic genius; it was his true subject, but it remains his undiscovered subject, it is the subject which *we* must dig out for him, because he himself had neither the lamp nor the pick to find it in and mine it out of the labyrinths of his experience. Like Emily Bronte, Wolfe needed a point of view beyond his own which would separate his material and its effect.

With Farrell, the situation is opposite. He knows quite well what his subject is and what he wishes to tell us about it, but he hardly needs the novel to do so. It is significant that in sheer

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clumsiness of style, no living writer exceeds him, for his prose is asked to perform no service beyond communication of the most rudimentary kind of fact. For his ambitions, the style of the newspaper and the lens of the documentary camera would be quite adequate, yet consider the diminution which Leopold Bloom, for example, would suffer, if he were to be viewed from these, the technical perspectives of James Farrell. Under the eye of this technique, the material does not yield up enough; indeed, it shrinks.

More and more writers in this century have felt that naturalism as a method imposes on them strictures which prevent them from exploring through all the resources of technique the full amplifications of their subjects, and that thus it seriously limits the possible breadth of aesthetic meaning and response. James Farrell is almost unique in the complacency with which he submits to the blunt techniques of naturalism; and his fiction is correspondingly repetitive and flat.

That naturalism had a sociological and disciplinary value in the nineteenth century is obvious; it enabled the novel to grasp materials and make analyses which had eluded it in the past, and to grasp them boldly; but even then it did not tell us enough of what, in Virginia Woolf's phrase, is "really real," nor did it provide the means to the maximum of reality coherently contained. Even the Flaubertian ideal of objectivity seems, today, an unnecessarily limited view of objectivity, for as almost every good writer of this century shows us, it is quite as possible to be objective about subjective states as it is to be objective about the circumstantial surfaces of life. Dublin, in *Ulysses,* is a moral setting: not only a city portrayed in the naturalistic fashion of Dickens' London, but also a map of the modern psyche with its oblique and baffled purposes. The second level of reality in no way invalidates the first, and a writer like Joyce shows us that, if the artist truly respects his medium, he can be objective about both at once. What we need in fiction is a devoted fidelity to every technique which will help us to discover and to evaluate our subject matter, and more than that, to discover the amplifi-

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cations of meaning of which our subject matter is capable.

Most modern novelists have felt this demand upon them. André Gide allowed one of his artist-heroes to make an observation which considerably resembles an observation we have quoted from Wells. "My novel hasn't got a subject. . . . Let's say, if you prefer it, it hasn't got *one* subject. . . . 'A slice of life,' the naturalist school said. The great defect of that school is that it always cuts its slice in the same direction; in time, lengthwise. Why not in breadth? Or in depth? As for me I should like not to cut at all. Please understand; I should like to put everything into my novel." Wells, with his equally large blob of potential material, did not know how to cut it to the novel's taste; Gide cut, of course—in every possible direction. Gide and others. And those "cuts" are all the new techniques which modern fiction has given us. None, perhaps, is more important than that inheritance from French symbolism which Huxley, in the gittering wake of Gide, called "the musicalization of fiction." Conrad anticipated both when he wrote that the novel "must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music—which is the art of arts," and when he said of that early but wonderful piece of symbolist fiction, *Heart of Darkness*, "It was like another art altogether. That sombre theme had to be given a sinister resonance, a tonality of its own, a continued vibration that, I hoped, would hang in the air and dwell on the ear after the last note had been struck." The analogy with music, except as a metaphor, is inexact, and except as it points to techniques which fiction can employ as fiction, not very useful to our sense of craftsmanship. It has had an approximate exactness in only one work, Joyce's final effort, and an effort unique in literary history, *Finnegan's Wake*, and here, of course, those readers willing to approach the "ideal" effort Joyce demands, discovering an inexhaustible wealth and scope, are most forcibly reminded of the primary importance of technique to subject, and of their indivisibility.

The techniques of naturalism inevitably curtail subject and

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often leave it in its original area, that of undefined social experience. Those of our writers who, stemming from this tradition, yet, at their best, achieve a novelistic definition of social experience—writers like the occasional Sherwood Anderson, William Carlos Williams, the occasional Erskine Caldwell, Nathaniel West, and Ira Wolfert in *Tucker's People*, have done so by pressing naturalism far beyond itself, into positively gothic distortions. The structural machinations of Dos Passos and the lyrical interruptions of Steinbeck are the desperate maneuvers of men committed to a method of whose limitations they despair. They are our symbolists *manqué*, who end as allegorists.

Our most accomplished novels leave no such impression of desperate and intentional struggle, yet their precise technique and their determination to make their prose work in the service of their subjects have been the measure of their accomplishment. Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and Wescott's *The Pilgrim Hawk* are works of art not because they may be measured by some external, neo-classic notion of form, but because their forms are so exactly equivalent with their subjects, and because the evaluation of their subjects exists in their styles.

Hemingway has recently said that his contribution to younger writers lay in a certain necessary purification of the language; but the claim has doubtful value. The contribution of his prose was to his subject, and the terseness of style for which his early work is justly celebrated is no more valuable, as an end in itself, than the baroque involutedness of Faulkner's prose, or the cold elegance of Wescott's. Hemingway's early subject, the exhaustion of value, was perfectly investigated and invested by his bare style, and in story after story, no meaning at all is to be inferred from the fiction except as the style itself suggests that there is no meaning in life. This style, more than that, was the perfect technical substitute for the conventional commentator; it expresses and it measures that peculiar morality of the stiff lip which Hemingway borrowed from athletes. It is an instructive lesson, furthermore, to observe how the style breaks down when Hemingway moves into the less congenial subject matter of

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social affirmation: how the style breaks down, the effect of verbal economy as mute suffering is lost, the personality of the writer, no longer protected by the objectification of an adequate technique, begins its offensive intrusion, and the entire structural integrity slackens. Inversely, in the stories and the early novels, the technique was the perfect embodiment of the subject and it gave that subject its astonishing largeness of effect and of meaning.

One should correct Buffon and say that style is the subject. In Wescott's *Pilgrim Hawk,* a novel which bewildered its many friendly critics by the apparent absence of subject, the subject, the story, is again in the style itself. This novel, which is a triumph of the sustained point of view, is only bewildering if we try to make a story out of the narrator's observations upon others; but if we read his observations as oblique and unrecognized observations upon himself the story emerges with perfect coherence, and it reverberates with meaning, is as suited to continuing reflection as the greatest lyrics.

The rewards of such respect for the medium as the early Hemingway and the occasional Wescott have shown may be observed in every good writer we have. The involutions of Faulkner's style are the perfect equivalent of his involved structures, and the two together are the perfect representation of the moral labyrinths he explores, and of the ruined world which his novels repeatedly invoke and in which these labyrinths exist. The cultivated sensuosity of Katherine Anne Porter's style has charm in itself, of course, but no more than with these others does it have aesthetic value in itself; its values lie in the subtle means by which sensuous details become symbols, and in the way that the symbols provide a network which is the story, and which at the same time provides the writer and us with a refined moral insight by means of which to test it. When we put such writers against a writer like William Saroyan, whose respect is reserved for his own temperament, we are appalled by the stylistic irresponsibility we find in him, and by the almost total absence of theme, or defined subject matter, and the abundance

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of unwarranted feeling. Such a writer inevitably becomes a sentimentalist because he has no means by which to measure his emotion. Technique, at last, is measure.

These writers, from Defoe to Porter, are of unequal and very different talent, and technique and talent are, of course, after a point, two different things. What Joyce gives us in one direction, Lawrence, for all his imperfections as a technician, gives us in another, even though it is not usually the direction of art. Only in some of his stories and in a few of his poems, where the demands of technique are less sustained and the subject matter is not autobiographical, Lawrence, in a different way from Joyce, comes to the same aesthetic fulfilment. Emily Bronte, with what was perhaps her intuitive grasp of the need to establish a tension between her subject matter and her perspective upon it, achieves a similar fulfilment; and, curiously, in the same way and certainly by intuition alone, Hemingway's early work makes a moving splendor from nothingness.

And yet, whatever one must allow to talent and forgive in technique, one risks no generalization in saying that modern fiction at its best has been peculiarly conscious of itself and of its tools. The technique of modern fiction, at once greedy and fastidious, achieves as its subject matter not some singleness, some topic or thesis, but the whole of the modern consciousness. It discovers the complexity of the modern spirit, the difficulty of personal morality, and the fact of evil—all the untractable elements under the surface which a technique of the surface alone can not approach. It shows us—in Conrad's words, from *Victory*—that we all live in an "age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel," and while it puts its hard light on our environment, it penetrates, with its sharp weapons, the depths of our bewilderment. These are not two things, but only an adequate technique can show them as one. In a realist like Farrell, we have the environment only, which we know from the newspapers; in a subjectivist like Wolfe, we have the bewilderment only, which we record in our own diaries and letters. But the true novelist gives them to us

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together, and thereby increases the effect of each, and reveals each in its full significance.

Eliabeth Bowen, writing of Lawrence, said of modern fiction, "We want the naturalistic surface, but with a kind of internal burning. In Lawrence every bush burns." But the bush burns brighter in some places than in others, and it burns brightest when a passionate private vision finds its objectification in exacting technical search. If the vision finds no such objectification, as in Wolfe and Saroyan, there is a burning without a bush. In our committed realists, who deny the resources of art for the sake of life, whose technique forgives both innocence and slovenliness—in Defoe and Wells and Farrell, there is a bush but it does not burn. There, at first glance, the bush is only a bush; and then, when we look again, we see that, really, the thing is dead.

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Letter from England

D. S. SAVAGE

NO SERIOUS SURVEY of current English literary activity can afford to neglect the social conditions within which works of literature must today be produced. There has been a war, with a consequent confusion of faces and deterioration of the quality of civilized living. The nineteenth-century social and economic system of privilege based on foreign debt is collapsing, and this means fewer Oscar Wildes, Norman Douglases and Aldous Huxleys. A Labour Government is in power and, so far from fostering the arts and subsidizing artists as some of its more gullible adherents among the intelligentsia had hoped, it is proving on the whole inimical to cultural values; an implicit doctrine of "bread alone"—that is, bread and guns—prevails. Literature is protected by the publishing trade, which is tolerated because it produces both "invisible exports" and a solid foreign cash return. Ours is now a two-class society, but the class division is not stable, nor is it sanctioned by rights and duties. Roughly, the new division is between the working population and the more, or less, respectable racketeers of every kind and quality (the term is inclusive) who live at a luxury standard. Previously these people had formed a branch of the comparatively stable middle-class, but in the precarious, jolted world of today the parasitical natures of their callings have become more clearly revealed, and they have been joined by numbers of socially displaced persons who have grasped the dazzling truth revealed by war-time and post-war conditions that the way to the stars lies not through productive work but through cashing-in in some way on the needs of a disorganized society. A paradoxical situation arises from the fact that the politicians in power have two conflicting aims: on the

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one hand to preserve social privilege and the amenities of the luxury life (else why be a politician?) and on the other hand to stop the rot that is spreading through the social fabric. Just recently compulsory direction of labour has been reintroduced, a move widely received as a further advance to the total state, and simultaneously a propaganda campaign has been blown up through the press directed at "spivs", "drones" and "butterflies" —terms which may come to mean loosely almost anybody not directly engaged in productive labour, and may in time become a socialist substitute for the Nazi "jew" or the Communist "kulak". Since direction affects only the depressed masses of the population whose names are registered at the Labour Exchanges, it is easy enough to discern the trend of this move. Eventually our two-class society will become defined and stabilized, and it will not be a healthy state of affairs that is thus perpetuated.

How is the writer affected by all this? Prospects for literature seem to me to take some such shape as this: there will be a place in society for those linked directly to the machinery of education, for those employed by "cultural" bodies paying big salaries like the British Council and the B.B.C., and for those freelance writers engaged in popular journalism and the manufacture of pabulum for the circulating libraries. Less than ever will there be room for the independent artist, the poet, the critic, the thinker.

The prospects for an individual literary talent in England, when it is not supported by inherited wealth, are not good. In my brief time I have seen young writers emerge with poetic gifts, intellectual endowments, a lively devotion to literature, to write first novels, edit little reviews and contribute to the literary columns of some of the better weeklies; and I have seen them (granted, the war may have accounted for much of this) fade into maturity with jobs in the Ministry of Information, the B.B.C., the British Council, or into advertising, film work and the writing of detective stories. Frankly, no-one is interested in the subsidizing of original creative or critical work, and without subsidy it is difficult to see, under present conditions, how on

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earth good unpopular work is to be done. I must make an exception here for the Rockefeller Foundation's assistance towards setting up the Atlantic Awards in Literature for the distribution of one-year grants to British writers "whose careers have been interrupted by the war." (Careers!) These grants have been valuable, though inadequate. Tribute must be paid, too, to Somerset Maugham for his example in instituting a permanent fund to enable one young writer to travel abroad each year. It still seems to me shameful that so little is done, in Britain itself, to aid young, struggling authors. The aims of the British Council, which are, unblushingly, to use British cultural achievement as a stalking horse for future export drives, seem to me quite viciously parasitical unless there is some corresponding awareness of responsibility for the nourishment of independent artistic achievement within Britain—which there is not. The B.B.C. is the biggest employer of literary talent in the country, but all it does is, at the highest, to foster a superior kind of literary journalism. In an endeavour to atone for its war-time collapse into barbarism it went into a huddle more than a year ago in order to institute a "cultural" Third Programme. This programme's musical record has been good, and its dramatic record not so bad, but on the literary side it has been deplorable. It has ventured into literary criticism. In a series entitled "The Poet and his Critic", a number of poets, some of them good ones, lent themselves to a painful exhibition in which the critic gave an appraisal of his pet poet on one day, the poet replied with a reading of his poems on the next, and there followed a coy little game of bat and ball on the third occasion between the two. But not all the poets were good ones, and the B.B.C. functionary in charge had scoured the alleys for the weirdest collection of so-called critics it would be possible to find within a hundred yards of Fleet Street. Similarly, the best it could do in the series "Living Writers" was to collect a motley crew of literary odd-job men to serve up potted appreciations of Forster, de la Mare, Orwell, Greene, Isherwood, Waugh and others, with extensive extracts from their novels read in dramatized style. At its worst, we had criticism like this from John Betjeman, book columnist for the *Daily Herald*:

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> There is no living novelist whose works I so thoroughly enjoy as those of Evelyn Waugh . . . I do not think it is just because Evelyn Waugh is of my own world and age that he appeals to me. We have both known Oxford of the 'twenties, school-mastering, country house life in England and Ireland, chattering parties with the Bright Young Things in chromium flats, and then piling into open cars to drive through midnight London and bathe by the moon in a Middlesex pond.

Not all these talks contained such gems of irrelevance; some were quite competently managed. But Rose Macaulay, a faded best-selling novelist, managed to approach Betjeman's level with a number of spiritless generalities on E. M. Forster which, adding nothing whatever to our understanding of her subject, may be quoted as a fair specimen of what is allowed to pass for criticism by the B.B.C. culture experts:

> Mr. Forster is a mystic . . . the poet has always been a prominent partner in his work. Whatever critics may say, for instance, of *A Passage to India*, as a story, a study of a problem, a study of races and of people, it must live for its sheer beauty. . . . The words, the precise, clear detail, so unexpected, so unliterary, have the qualities of the poet's or artist's direct vision. . . .

These talks have just been published in a volume, the editor-producer of which writes that the function of the Third Programme is "to set up inside broadcasting the highest possible standards." Need one say more?

So, then, English life at present is in flux. Disinterested intellectual endeavour is becoming harder to maintain. Sincere young writers are being forced out to the margins of society, while at the centre there is the padded-cell sort of culture represented by the B.B.C. It seems possible that as the social order hardens into shape we shall witness the emergence of two cultures—an official and an unofficial, the one well-paid, flashy and sterile, drawing upon the talents of debauched artists and intellectuals, and the other surviving only through extreme enthusiasm and devotion. Just at present the abrupt collapse of literary standards

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effected by the outbreak of war, expressed in the disappearance of serious minority periodicals and the flooding of the bookstalls with reach-me-down miscellanies of reading-matter, appears to have been arrested, and with the emergence of a new generation into literacy there are signs of concerted attempts at the reassertion of cultural values and critical standards. The admirable work done in the maintenance of standards of literary discrimination by Dr. F. R. Leavis and his associates at Cambridge grouped around the review *Scrutiny,* is being carried to a wider public through a lively new quarterly, *The Critic,* which has as companion paper *Politics and Letters. Focus,* which appears occasionally, presents symposia and discussions on key issues of literature, and has devoted numbers to serious studies of Kafka and T. S. Eliot. Hole-and-corner attempts at the restatement of the western tradition are being made by such quarterlies as *Humanitas, Wind & the Rain,* and (I am told) *The Changing World.* Besides these, the Stalin-Marxists have their *Modern Quarterly;* the Logical Positivists, with Ayer and Russell to the fore, and Spender and Orwell in the rear, have their platform in *Polemic,* whose intentions at least are not frivolous. The pacifist-libertarians and rebels in general have their *Now,* and the rather vaguely-defined personalists appear sporadically in the book-magazine *Transformation.* The verse which finds its way into print these days seems to my jaundiced eye decidedly inferior on the whole to that produced in the pre-war period. During the year I have reviewed, I suppose, about sixty new novels, only one of which—Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano,* which has already been extensively commented on in the United States—I shall want to read again. Of literary ebullition there is little; controversy is rare, and on a low level. Pre-war poets like Spender, Day Lewis and MacNeice still function, but their work goes steadily from bad to worse; Spender's latest book, *Poems of Dedication,* is vulgar and pretentious. These poets are now capable of the grossest lapses into bad taste, *vide* a recent obstetric piece by Day Lewis in the *New Statesman.* The war has been a shock to the developing writers of the time; it caught them off their balance, and many have been quite demoralized.

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It seems likely that the creative writer of the immediate future will be forced by his circumstances out of the purely aesthetic role he has struggled to maintain in the past, and out of the shallow politicism into which he was sometimes lured in reaction to it. In his struggle to survive he will be forced to take serious account of the sort of world he is living in, and of the human condition which it reveals, and to develop other than strictly literary or political reactions to it.

POSTSCRIPT

It was rather more than a hundred years ago (to be exact, on July 7th, 1831) that Coleridge delivered himself of the following indictment of the English indifference to the fine arts:

> The darkest despotisms on the Continent have done more for the growth and elevation of the fine arts than the English government. A great musical composer in Germany and Italy is a great man in society, and a real dignity and rank are universally conceded to him. So it is with a sculptor, or painter, or architect. Without this sort of encouragement and patronage such arts as music and painting will never come into great eminence. In this country there is no general reverence for the fine arts; and the sordid spirit of a money-amassing philosophy would meet any proposition for the fostering of art, in a genial and extended sense, with the commercial maxim,—*Laissez faire*. Paganini, indeed, will make a fortune, because he can actually sell the tones of his fiddle at so much a scrape; but Mozart himself might have languished in a garret for anything that would have been done for him here.

It seems the British official character has not greatly changed in a hundred years. One of the curious things about the present administration (which has just voted an annual income of forty thousand pounds to the Heiress Presumptive and ten thousand to her Consort) is its fetishistic veneration for the abstraction known as Education, upon which it is prepared to lavish its resources; a veneration which is unaccompanied by any respect for, or even awareness of, the ends of education, so that while education is fatted, culture is starved. Since writing the main part of this letter, my attention has been caught by an announcement of the proposed establishment of an organization which, if successfully

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maintained, might do much for the arts in Britain—The Institute of Contemporary Arts. The idea, it appears, is to "bring the arts together under one roof and provide a permanent co-operative and educational centre . . . gathering together into one coherent effort those manifestations in the various arts which at present are isolated and sporadic." The Institute will perform the role of a patron insofar as it aims to "undertake definite projects and to exhibit or perform works of art which promise no profit to commercial undertakings." The name of the Chairman, Herbert Read, should be a sufficient guarantee that the project will be serious and adventurous. Once again, money is the stumbling-block: a sum estimated at fifty thousand pounds (oddly enough) is required for its establishment, and I suppose the raising of this sum is pretty problematical.

As a footnote to the first part of my letter, I might add that a few days after writing it, I received a printed circular communication from Mr. J. B. Pick, editor of *Gangrel* and author of *Under the Crust,* addressed "To all writers and artists", and calling upon them, in response to the Control of Engagements Order, to resist any attempt on the part of the State to interfere forcibly with their devotion to their vocation. "We are called upon," writes Mr. Pick, "in the name of the community to serve the State."

> Every act of Government can now be effective only if it is supported by the most rigorous police sanctions. Britain is, in fact, becoming a Police State. No Party or doctrinal catch-phrase can alter this obvious fact. . . . The truth is concealed, however, by the inability of the Government to realize that it is, in its effort to 'preserve British democracy', introducing fascism. It is all 'due to the Crisis' and the Crisis is 'due to the war'. In other words, we are the victims of a world trend towards totalitarianism. There are many arguments which can be used to persuade us to save Britain by sacrifiing liberty, but trends may be altered by individual decisions, and liberty is worth preserving at the cost of security, prosperity and 'prestige'. Who, better than the vocationalist, is able to realize that the defence of freedom is not only worthwhile but essential if the survival of Britain and of humanity is to have any deep significance?

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A straw in the wind—and significant as such. In point of fact, Governmental interference with literary and cultural matters is extensive already. Paper rationing is still in force, with its consequent freezing of the channels of communication, and this will be exacerbated by the recent fuel rationing legislation, which has given low priority to the paper industry—this despite the acute shortage even of technical and educational textbooks. During the fuel crisis of last January, when stocks of coal ran out and many factories closed down in consequence, the Government prohibited publication, for two successive issues, of all weekly journals, without discrimination. (Dailies appeared as usual). This act could presumably be repeated with impunity at any time. The most recent of such interferences is the ban which has been placed upon the free import of foreign (including American) books; a serious nuisance immediately, especially to scholars and specialists, whose long-term results are incalculable. One is perpetually wondering, where will the next blow fall? Can it be that at the mention of the word culture our rulers reach, metaphorically, for their revolvers?

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Poem

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—E. E. CUMMINGS

Comment

MR. CONNOLLY'S AMERICA

THE ENGLISH MONTHLY REVIEW of literature and the arts, *Horizon*, has devoted its October issue to the American scene. "This is but one of several numbers which could be made about America and makes no claim to exclusivity," says the editor, Mr. Cyril Connolly, in a concluding note. But Mr. Connolly's America is one that has been conveyed, via *Horizon*, to thousands of English readers and to not a few in this country, and it is one that deserves close scrutiny.

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It is not the America of Americans. It is by turns the immigrant's America, the America of the casual wealthy transatlantic visitor (cultured, like Mr. Connolly, up to a point), and the *Amerika* of Auden and Kafka, the mirror of a spiritual unease. This alienation is expressed most clearly in Mr. William Barrett's *Notes on Being an American*: "I propose to convert the immigrant's condition into a cultural goal . . . the accident of birth and some obscurer accident of my nature have thrown me out of American life." Mr. Barrett is an intelligent man and an able writer; but he is in serious danger of giving universal significance to what is, to a large extent, a personal predicament. Similarly, Mr. William Phillips, in *Portrait of the Artist as an American*, gives a good account of the formidable cultural difficulties which tend to cripple the American artist, but no account at all of the strategies by which such difficulties have been, and are, overcome. These gentlemen are so concerned with the predicament that they are unable to get out of it themselves; thus it is possible for Mr. Barrett to attach excessive importance to a superficial comparison of America to Carthage, and for Mr. Phillips to dismiss contemporary criticism as a "most tragic waste of talent" and to dispose of Mr. Kenneth Burke as a constructor of "vast systems of elaborate irrelevancies." Both Mr. Phillips and Mr. Barrett are editors of *Partisan Review;* if one wishes to observe the consequences of an over-conscientious floundering in the social context, one has only to turn to the pages of that journal.

The 'American' issue of *Horizon*, then, is remarkable in that it makes no attempt to discuss or evaluate a single American writer, let alone American writing in general. Thus, it supplies no valid context for the three distinguished American poets who are represented in its pages or for the amusing 'specialized' articles of Prof. Barzun and Mr. H. M. McLuhan. Mr. Connolly is prone to substitute for intelligent criticism the kind of fashionable travelogue that we have come to associate with *Horizon*. The best exponent here of this type of writing is Mr. Connolly himself: the snobbery of his *Introduction* is mitigated by some acute observation of New York manners. But there is no justification for the empty competence of Mr. Christopher Isherwood's *Los Angeles* or the plodding fatuity of Mr. Philip Lamantia's *Letter from San Francisco*.

There is more that could be said about the issue. One might point out, for example, that the stories (including the single good one, Mr. John Berryman's *The Imaginary Jew*) seem to have been picked for their 'social significance' rather than for their literary merit. The main argument, at any rate, should be clear: one of the best ways to understand a nation is by way of a careful and perceptive criticism of its literature; this is a job Mr. Connolly does not tackle, and his half-measures can only distort.

F. M.

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Recent Verse

WILLIAM ARROWSMITH

THE SEA-FARING, by *Louis Coxe*. Henry Holt. $2.50
THE EGO AND THE CENTAUR, by *Jean Garrigue*. New Directions. $2.50
THE IMAGE AND THE LAW, by *Howard Nemerov*. Henry Holt. $2.00
A MAP OF VERONA, by *Henry Reed*. Reynal and Hitchcock. $2.50
TRIAL OF A POET, by *Karl Shapiro*. Reynal and Hitchcock. $2.00
THE GOOD EUROPEAN, by *R. P. Blackmur*. The Cummington Press. $5.00

THESE SIX POETS are sufficiently good that no one construct, however compulsive, will support them long or all at once; at second best, in intent and often in performance, they compose seriously in the mode of poetic imagination. Thus, of the poets represented, all are serious, almost all are competent craftsmen, three have the *virtue* of originality and two of them compose what is unmistakably poetry. Yet four of these books are first publications; and if they often fall short in execution, they have the right amount of provisional uncertainty to be promising or better. Henry Reed, in particular among the younger poets, writes poetry which is professional, original and articulate in the best sense. Quite naturally, it is in this area of articulation and/or apprehension that the others stumble most severely, their poems become perverse and fail to realize themselves in language. Or, obversely, language of a rhetorical sort so engineers the poem that the richness and verbal perversity of actual insight get tamed away. In either case, we get poetry as a *sub rosa* means of discourse, either barbarous or vulgar.

Louis Coxe has a kind of literary discretion which can in part account for both his failure and his success: he needs the poorer half of valor, much as Nemerov needs the better half, to protect himself from rhetorical insight Where he is least successful as in *Movie Party, Tulagi, Pin-Up Girl* or *Melville* the rhetoric seems worked up in lieu of insight and the title does more paraphrasing than it should. Coxe's subject, I take it, is one form of *lacrimae rerum*, bounded by war, in terms of sea-faring. That he often, like Shapiro sentimentalizes his subject-matter and chooses the easier way—a loose backdrop of either death or home for the continuum of sea—is legitimate if the language comes to the fore and apprehends well. This it does in parts of *The Sea-Faring* and *Sea-Elegy* and in his best poem, *Red Right Returning* where the articulation is equal to the apprehension.

His most ambitious poem, *The Sea-Faring*, has an expansive structure, largely ruminative, but rather an odyssey of mood than of continued inference and development. Like its nominal subject, the poem seems to be envisioned in disparity, to create more the materiel than the total convoy of meaning: a

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petrel on the depth-charge racks, an apostrophe to the radarman, the business of watch-changing. This, I think, is because Coxe is unwilling to censor observation and delete description unless he finds it downright inimical to his purpose. His poem thus has the uncritical *détente* of a log-book from which few possibilities can be excluded because the purpose is record, not construct. Similarly, *Movie-Party, Tulagi* is destroyed by the unwillingness to exclude a trite possibility even when the situation is one of central importance: for against the "loud philosophy" and cheapness of movie actuality he juxtaposes the dead of Tulagi, a parallel so obvious that it is almost a mockery of the reality he means. In such circumstances his failure is one of total discretion and the opposite of his usual tendency to make discretion too much of a good thing, to chasten his insight into stock language, to be direct at the expense of complexity and at the danger of vulgarity. Against these pitfalls, he has singular honesty, firm talent, an excellent sense of syntax and, for better or for worse, a temptation that is transparent and affirming.

With Jean Garrigue, the initial temptation to compose is geared to a kind of spunk in language that makes her verse vivid, flamboyant, difficult or grotesque. At her best, her form and idiom surpass the Auden she covets—nor is her use of poetry, like his, often subversive; at her worst, she dickers with great vehemence and élan about an unspecified noun, the verbs stampede broadcast and we get language of an undirected magnitude. But this is infrequent and the magnitude is usually uppermost, losing direction most often because a poem is stunted and lyric at the expense of the necessary drama; it develops, if at all, by restatement. The poem, *How weary, cold, unreal, the heats of love,* otherwise convincing and a fine performance, loses by being heavy with surplus phrasing, with no gaps left for the responsible reader. And the same is true of a dozen other poems where the words connive more at creating other words than at completion. I am not convinced that Miss Garrigue has found a suitable style as yet: her manner seems often too postured for security, although she gives more evidence of having schooled herself in the tradition than, say, have either Mr. Coxe or Mr. Nemerov. She has a much finer sense than either of them of the total rhythm of several lines or a stanza as well as an unusual tendency to be oral and to come aloud in cadence. But it is her diction which is the persistent root of her failure: "brave boys, gorgeously ganged, gang round"/ "blood-light, rose-christ light"/ "lily leg"/ "then be us bird bone"/ "you circummortal us." Or occasionally syntax and even grammar:

> Then what herbs control his will
> And grassy sleep is his where he is not?

* * * *

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. . . accost
The looking-glass we are
And who mends which for who?

Most of these instances stem from an attempt to use language as a tone of meaning at a pitch where it may persist, but almost inaudibly so. This is not to say that it cannot be done successfully, but the failure is expensive. Twice, I think, Miss Garrigue succeeds: partially, in a very fine metaphysical poem, *Marriage is a Mystery of Joy*, and more fully in *Only the Irresistible Abides*, which I quote in part with apology because it needs all it has:

Foresaw strength devoured by the weakness it came forth from,
The eye, flag of the war,
Dark light of the head, dark, hovered blood,
Cut tear, maniacal pity,
The smile bled by its subtleties there,
Killed pang, compassion, satirical mercy,
Sleep dead; the mouth closed like a grave upon
Traitorous censors, sweet frauds, hypocrites of the heart.

Her poetry is not inwardly difficult; on slight acquaintance her patterns become predictable, not because they are rigid, but because they conform to a familiar rationale of imagination. The ego and the centaur of her title indicate her world: the ego is familiar enough—the older ego of the schoolmen; nor can there be much doubt about her centaur

whose glitter, turning within the vast unknowable,
Perception grasps and can't let go,
Cold Adam of improbables,
Sweet centaur of the philosophical manuals!

The poles of Miss Garrigue's titles are to be made identical, if ever, in poetry. Similarly, the duality of *image* and *law*, "the way of the eye and that of the mind," is, for Mr. Nemerov, finally reconcilable in poetry. The last poem of his book belatedly but directly deals with the title and is an index of what he is up to:

There is the world, the dream, and the one law.
The wish, the wisdom, and things as they are.

Inside the cave the burning sunlight showed
A shade and forms between the light and shade,

Neither real nor false nor subject to belief:
If unfleshed, boneless also, not for life

Or death or clear idea. But as in life
Reflexive, multiple, with the brilliance of

The shining surface, an orchestral flare.
It is not to believe, the love or fear

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Or their profoundest definition, death;
But fully as orchestra to accept,

Making an answer, even if lament,
In measured dance, with the whole instrument.

Syntactically and verbally the poem is Stevens'; the Platonism is anybody's; there can be no quarrel with derivation as explicit as this. The poem is not difficult, the language is hard at work, the perception is steady and developed and yet, except as a good gloss upon the image and the law, the poem does not come off. I cannot help but think that the blame lies in Nemerov's failure to provide this poem and others with significant integrity by making his myth his own: whose image, whose law? His poles, like Stevens' guitar, have a way of becoming blueprints rather than agents of perfecting insight. And as such, they are more nearly akin to the law than to the image.

A large number of his poems are, in this way, imperfect: correct, self-contained, but without substantial conviction, the derivations become too extensive, too good copies: Auden and Stevens are too persistently present for judgment or comfort. Among his lighter poems, nice irony and effective diction control both *History of a Literary Movement* and *Metropolitan Sunday; A Chromium-Plated-Hat* is pure clinker and banality. Similarly, the book as a whole is spotty and poorly-proportioned, the talent still promiscuous and unattached. This is all the more regrettable since five or six poems, particularly *Europe* and *The Frozen City,* have a genuine distinction and formal balance. This is good, for both poems are ambitious and also, I believe, both recent, in evidence of a bias decided upon and taken. He has both unmistakable talent and promise. Nor do I mean this disarmingly.

Henry Reed, unless I am badly mistaken, has written in *A Map of Verona* a first book of poetry which is neither premature nor uneven; it is sustained poetry at a very high level, of a sort which few poets write today, either because they cannot or because they have not felt it worthwhile. If the latter is true, it argues that our contemporary criticism has been misdirected or misread, perhaps both. But it is curious that a criticism which has continually emphasized the poem as poem, as an artistic unit, should witness so many partial poems even by our better poets—poems which lack total composition and depend upon a part at the expense of the full flare. It is thus very much to the credit of Mr. Reed that there is hardly a poem in his book which is not capitalized upon *as a poem;* if his diction is occasionally slack and his lines lazy, the total should, in time, guarantee the part. Much of Mr. Reed's value, I think, stems from his conversance with the tradition of poetry; his constructs from literary mythology—the Tristram story, Sophocles, Melville—attain almost the maximum actuality possible in this kind of revival. The sections *Tintagel*

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and *Desert* (in particular *South* and *The Builders*) contain some of the best poetry of the last few years, not simply as form *plus* content but the whole business multiplied into total effect. The poetry is deceptively simple because properly conceived and the imagination seems to have apprehended almost at the moment of articulation:

> And do you think I would not reach towards you,
> As the screen of stone falls into place between us,
> And the dirge begins, do you think I do not know?
> * * * * * * *
> O you, who will never be other than children,
> Do you think, if I could, I would not reach my hand,
> Through the burning mist and the echoing night of blackness,
> To bless you, soothe you, and guide you through your hell?
> * * * * * * *
> When brow on brow, or mouth to mouth assembled,
> We lie in the calm of the morning. And there, outside us,
> The sun moves on, the boat jogs on the lake,
> The huntsman calls.
> And we lie here, our orient peace awaking
> No echo, and no shadow, and no reflection.

There seems to be a debt to Eliot but it is rather a debt controlled and incorporated. The blank-verse line is firmly mastered and so too is the cadence. His originality is of the finest sort, that is, it is educated; and he possesses a talent and style which is as individual as that of Robert Lowell, with whom he shares the promise of achieving major proportions.

With Shapiro, almost everything is present which should make excellent poetry: real facility and ease, technical ability, a structure of value and a habit of composing steadily and making the most of his poetic means. Such resources should have made his fourth book better in bulk than it actually is and should not have found him still recapitulating, without significant advance, a manner which he seemed already to have put to its maximum use. He has not, of course, put this manner to its greatest use but has corralled himself into the restricted area under his control. If this area represents *known* limitations, there can be no argument: the moral is Housman. What direction his development will finally take is uncertain; but he will need greater verbal intensity, a context of emotional drama and longer exposure to less visible meaning.

But the *Trial of A Poet*, unlike the other poems, is half of a direction taken and taken well. Its nominal situation is that of Ezra Pound and Pound's "crime" and Pound's society; its extensions are prose and poetry, evil and good. An excellent dialogue between a Public Officer, a Priest and a Chorus of Poets precedes the commentary of the Poet upon them and his judgment

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(under drugs) upon himself. If you agree with Shapiro, the Judgment is just and even true:

> I will now pass sentence. There is, of course, no fit punishment for poets but one. Prison is scarcely a hardship to the man who dwells in a universe of his own design. Exile has compensations also for the single wanderer. Death, under his fear, will only interest him. Confiscation will amuse him because he owns nothing and has burned more books than you will ever buy. . . . Sterilization will not concern him—he is already the apogee of his race. Therefore, for the crime of acting upon the sense of poetry as upon the sense of prose, I condemn the prisoner to be known hereafter as a dull poet and the lapdog of his age.

Pound is Antigone in reverse: who buries Polyneices in order to commit treason in order to destroy Creon, composite Officer, Priest and self:

> The epigraph is taken from *Samson Agonistes* and reads as follows: Israel is poetry. Thy country is America. The Philistine is the enemy within. In destroying the works of the Philistine, the prisoner blindly destroyed himself.

The coda belongs to the chorus:

> Ours is the miracle of water and wine,
> Stones to fishes, leaves to loaves,
> And common clay to prayer and pleasure domes.
> Yours is the miracle of the transubstantiation
> Of sculpture to gravel, bread to dirt,
> Fishes to chemicals, wine to vinegar.
> —The crime? There was no crime. Prose is no crime.
> There was, however, a failure of the word;
> The failure was to fall into your hands.

The poem is good enough, or controversial enough, that one writes rather about Pound and evil and prose than about Shapiro.

R. P. Blackmur as a poet has received only little attention; by a curious preconception he has come to be a critic at his cost as a poet. Where his work has received inspection, it has generally been sloughed off as derivative or malformed and obscure. Neither charge is significantly true, and Blackmur is at least as good a poet as the better among his contemporaries and maturer than most of them. As compared with, say, Stevens, he has written little, but sufficiently to give his work handle and importance. His means are many: best, his ear is extraordinary and accurate, his vocabulary has singular richness and his insight is as deep and right as that of any contemporary poet. Curiously, his faults are the extremes of his virtues, not their absence or the absence of something else, but ripeness ripened until it becomes a trespass against response. There are few things like it in literature and I think it stems from a habit, pernicious in extremes, of augmenting, by outraging, all possibilities of perception. When set up in a poem, this habit produces meaning so highly

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inflected as to seem obscure, like the jangle of a quarter-tone scale upon Western ears. But; by and large, Blackmur has excluded this over-inflection from his more ambitious poetry by taming it or by giving it time and room to work out its own form in a series of poems called *Scarabs for the Living*. The title is significant not merely as a catchall, but indicates a general method and area of apprehension that is unique. The dictionary, rightly, tells us all we need to know: that a scarab is a beetle which breeds in dung, that it was worshipped by Egyptians as a symbol of immortality and resurrection, and that it was used as an amulet for the dead. The meanings are all related and Blackmur, I believe, means all of them. The poems, like the scarab, breed in what is otherwise unassimilable, the end-products of meaning and unmoralized waste. It is this muck which renews the poem like a first cause, much as Aristotle's mud made the eel. The poem is, finally, an amulet for the living but only so if Blackmur is successful. In short, what he is after is that *vital obscenity*, that dark corner, which renews both the imagination and life:

> "I cannot live," man's nearest ape cried out,
> "unless my ugliness assert its good
> Like Socrates."—Who is in self so stout,
> so plain and passionate in fortitude,
> he can keep down the outrage of his own lout?

Or:

> Again severalty falls
> the vast like and dislike
> the rich rage and love's small change
> in the same loins
> the full and fell
> awake for loving use.

His most important poem, *The Good European*, 1945, is among the best of contemporary poetry. Superficially difficult, it repays close reading and suspended interpretation. For the European, for anyone, value is renewable, if at all, in the distortion which inheres in value and is actual; and that distortion must be admitted into dignity:

> All things
> are possible in their corruption, none
> without. Love takes the risk the best is worst.
> * * * * * * *
> —Surely each Phoenix must have been old crow
> in his own glass, scarecrow to the faithful,
> so ancient his annunciation seemed,
> so cold at dark noon his residual fire;
> even his gorgeousness showed ragged black
> in the fiery rage and fire-begotten wind;
> seemed draggled beyond capacity to fly—

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while acrid, thick, the dragon-smoke of flesh
half-suffocates that unexampled flame
in which the self utters the self consumed.
* * * * * * *
These lovers in disorder must
fresh-soak the ignominious dust
that blows and blinds us in dry flood
till all fall on their knees in blood.

No order that can bind and loose
self-violence and mass-abuse,
no order that can loose and bind
the shambles under the human mind;

no order ripens into weather
unless it bind and loose together
chaos of good consuming ill,
of lovers who search and shun God's will.

This is language in its best and most direct manner, the *plena rosa* of poetry. It is not obscurity that makes Blackmur's poetry difficult, but our own unfamiliarity.

A Modern Allegory

LAWRENCE McMILLIN

A MASQUE OF MERCY by *Robert Frost.* Henry Holt & Co. $2.50

IN *A MASQUE OF REASON,* published two years ago, and in the recent *A Masque of Mercy,* Robert Frost has fostered the revival of an old and bastard poetic form. He has recognized the possibility of combining some of the best elements of the Platonic dialogue, the Puritan allegory, and the closet drama in a modern philosophical and religious form of masque. What makes these masques remarkable does not, however, make them successful poetry.

A Masque of Reason is a twentieth century revision of Job. This twenty-three page dialogue, more clever than weighty, gingerly moves about the vast problem of reconciling the tribulation visited upon the just and unjust alike with the notion of a reasonably benevolent God. The characters are God, Job, the devil, and Thyatira, Job's apocalyptic wife. God is such a vain and incompetent old buffoon that Mr. Frost may be making fun of the fundamentalists and twitting his own skepticism as well. Job appears as a wealthy

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retired nomad. The devil looks like "a sapphire wasp that flickers mica wings," and God agrees with Job that the devil has lost his vitality. To Job's contention that "We can't leave him out," God replies:

No. No we don't need to.
We're too well off.

Later God elaborates:

church neglect
And figurative use have pretty well
Reduced him to a shadow of himself.

The fundamental impropriety of the poem is in its philosophical burlesque and anthropomorphic horseplay. God's excuse for allowing Job to suffer ("I was just showing off to the devil, Job") is neither amusing nor original. Thyatira's remark:

That's God. I'd know Blake's picture anywhere.

is clever, but inappropriate. Such theological banter is revolting to the orthodox, bewildering to the faithful, and unconvincing to the secular mind. Milton, the master of English prophetic poetry, and his masters, the Hebrew psalmists and prophets, knew that the poet, to clothe the letter with the life of myth and prophecy, must resist the temptation to let wit get the better of judgment.

Perhaps Mr. Frost has been overconsious of contemporary taste. Perhaps he is appointing us to forsake the cult of intellectualized sensation by reintroducing the theme of man's concern with the Unknown. Nevertheless, what is substantially lacking is that sense of tragedy without which the theme of human tribulation becomes a cosmic joke.

A connecting link between the first and second masques is the name Mr Frost gives Job's wife. Thyatira is one of the seven churches in the Book of the Apocalypse. The church of Thyatira is reprimanded for tolerating a false prophetess named Jezebel who was (or will be) mixing prophecy with fornication. In *A Masque of Reason* Job's wife querulously asks God why prophetesses should be persecuted more frequently than their male colleagues. In *A Masque of Mercy* the prophetess Jezebel turns up as Jesse Bel, an archetype of the modern woman of the nineteen-twenties. Both Thyatira and Jesse Bel are petulant feminists; Mr. Frost, like Mr. Shaw, has gleaned rather than borrowed from the wealth of Christian lore, but less sucessfully. Comedy is not equally at home everywhere and complexes of wit can be wasteful effort.

In the more successful *Masque of Mercy*, Mr. Frost is manipulating personalities with which he is somewhat more familiar. The Keeper of a proletarian bookstore opens his door to Jonas, an agrarian Jonah who is escaping from a storm and trying to escape the commission of his God. Besides Jesse Bel, Keeper, and Jonas, there is Paul, a modern off-shoot of the first Christian

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missionary and theologian. These characters work and act out a tentative solution to the problem of mercy and justice in the Christian God's relation with man:

Nothing can make injustice just but mercy.

The kind of piety which results from this conclusion is an heroic metaphysical vitalism. The uncertainty whether even our sacrifice, the best we have to offer, may be found acceptable in heaven's sight causes a profound metaphysical fear within us which seems to be a near relation of what the Existentialists call anxiety. We must take courage, the necessary complement to our basic skepticism, in order that we may persevere to great accomplishment. The characters reach the conclusion that St. Paul's New Testament mercy, not Keeper's Marxist or Jonas' Old Testament justice, can save us from the perils of uncertainty. The clamor for justice becomes a futile arrogance, making uncertainty unbearable.

A Masque of Mercy has greater density, solidity, and relevance to its theme than the earlier masque. The poem in spite of itself departs from the desperate flippancy and impertinent ingenuity which have been the curse of much recent reflective poetry. Nevertheless, it suffers more than the first masque from technical defects which stem from a similar failure to suit emotion to the theme. It is hard to believe, for instance, that Keeper should think that Rockwell Kent is the author of *Moby Dick*. Jesse Bel's erratic intellect is unconvincing. Sometimes she talks in the manner of a simpleton; sometimes in the manner of a female Socrates. At times, the characters' behavior is abstrusely mechanical; the emotional response of Keeper, Jesse Bel, and Paul to Jonas' death is particularly inadequate. Mr. Frost has unsuccessfully tried to turn the Miltonic trick of transforming his characters into particularized universals. He has packed much traditional material into this second masque without seeking the formal unity characteristic of Miltonic drama and epic. Such witty irrelevancies as a quip about *The New Yorker* magazine do but flounder in the mass of traditional philosophy and religion both symbolically and directly expressed. Mr. Frost has not created myth.

Turning to the question of style, I question whether the trim, deft line and the simple syntax of which Mr. Frost is master, are fitting or adequate for the purposes of prophetic poetry. Milton could never have succeeded by employing the styles and forms of his contemporary, Robert Herrick. But Mr. Frost is in general to be commended for his courageous if ill-executed attempts to redirect poetry in these days of existential anxiety and psychosomatic medicine. If he succeeds, the soul may gain a poetic currency which it has not enjoyed since the commencement of the Cartesian era.

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Recent Fiction

ROBERT B. HEILMAN

THE STOIC, by *Theodore Dreiser.* Doubleday. $3.00
THE MIDDLE OF THE JOURNEY, by *Lionel Trilling.* Viking. $3.00
THE AGE OF REASON, THE REPRIEVE, by *Jean-Paul Sartre,* translated by Eric Sutton. Knopf. $3.00 each
PROTHALAMIUM: A CYCLE OF THE HOLY GRAAL, by *Philip Toynbee.* Doubleday. $2.50

THE QUARTET OF NOVELISTS thrown together here have in common the fact that they are celebrities. Mr. Dreiser died after virtually a half-century of successful novel-writing; Mr. Trilling's reputation as an excellent critic is not new; M. Sartre occupies the most unusual role of being at once philosophic and fashionable; and Mr. Toynbee has behind him ancestral voices prophesying fame. And the celebrities are all endeavoring to deal, more or less philosophically, with problems inhering in present civilization: Mr. Dreiser with a free enterprise that has begotten materialism; Mr. Trilling, with the free mind that is threatened by competing absolutes; M. Sartre, with the free mind that is threatened by irresponsibility; and Mr. Toynbee, with a freedom that, as experience moves on inevitably in its organic cycles, is only illusory. As a group they have genuine claim upon our attention.

To read Dreiser in the company of those with whom publication dates have fortuitously thrown him is to experience a surprising anachronism, for here, written in the 1940's, is a work that in many ways comes out of the nineteenth century. Not that its theme is not up-to-date enough: we see, presumably as a symbolic history, the failure of a capitalist giant, the replacement of individualist by social values, and a sympathetic presentation of Oriental mysticism which one would expect rather from Mr. Huxley than from the American naturalist. But it is more like an essay than a novel, more like journalism than drama; it reminds one, in fact, of the immensely well documented biographical study of a public figure that might appear in a mass-circulation periodical where subtlety and innuendo are "out" and where the commentary, if any, is editorially direct. There is a Victorian completeness and solidity about the job, but without the resilience and bright play of Dickens at his best, the reflective competence of George Eliot, the metaphorical and allusive copiousness of Meredith, and the intensity, the irony, and the symbolism of the later Hardy. There is a simple ignoring of all that novelists have learned

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to do in the twentieth century, of all the devices of structure and suggestion that once seemed exotic and have now become standard. The style labors on, *semper idem;* the characters all talk alike, moving heavily from cliché to cliché. Here is Plain Prose, which surprises us only by being so plentiful; for it would not seem possible that the mind which writes so flat could write so long.

One is impressed by the research: Dreiser has learned much about the 1900-1910 period, and he tells all. There is rarely the illuminating imaginative flash that is better than a library full of mass-produced detail. But there is an abundance of fact. Hence arises an interesting problem: the aggregation of fact, which seems at first to be the essence of that "concrete" which nowadays is high critical fashion, never succeeds in persuading us that the author's intention has been successfully put into concrete form. We might at first conclude that the concrete has been over-rated, but that would be wrong. What does become necessary, however, is to make the distinction between the concrete and the pseudo-concrete. The concrete is the image, of whatever kind, which leads us imaginatively to backlying meanings; it is dramatic, and in the best prose it is always pushing toward the limits of poetry. The pseudo-concrete is the circumstantial, which takes us to the very heart of the prosaic. By definition it does not hit the aesthetic mark, but stands around the edges; in Dreiser it crowds around the edges. He gives us a kind of court record: he establishes his characters by circumstantial evidence rather than creates them by the dramatic stroke. He uses hearsay: he constantly tells us that characters desire and feel and yearn thus and so—but we only half-believe it. He understands them and he intends to invest them with a mature complexity; as analyst he is shrewd enough; but he lacks the poetic gift which can fuse the diverse elements into unity.

It is a pity that so much conscience, so much earnestness, so much striving should have produced so little: what *The Stoic* leaves with us is a sense of the pathos of effort. The Dying God, we fear, grew old without having quite grown up; and, except for the efforts of anxious historians, the stone will hardly be rolled away from the tomb.

Replace Mr. Dreiser's persistence with refinement, and his naïveté with sophistication, and the result is Mr. Trilling. Of *The Middle of the Journey* it may be said that it *illustrates* rather than *is;* it is less a novel than an assemblage of penetrating Dialogues and Characters (genres seldom practiced today); and the confronting of Characters in a situation yields allegory: Old Style Liberal (Kermit Simpson), Domgatic Left Progressive (the Crooms), Dogmatic Communist (Maxim), Dogmatic Neo-Christian (Maxim in his post-Communist phase), the Idea in Modulation or the Free Intelligence (Laskell). Yet there is a subtle apprehension of alternatives quite beyond Dreiser, and for apter comparison we must turn to Sartre: whereas Sartre is brilliantly

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imaginative in details, surfaces, episodes, but, one feels, uncertain about the total that all these parts add up to, Trilling has the abstract sum well in hand but is less a master of the concrete figures that are necessarily his symbols. His imperfect discipline of the fictional raw materials has two results. One is a great languor and lack of solidity in the first half of the book, a disadvantage notably lessened in the second half. The last quarter does develop an effective tension, though less between human agents with symbolic functions than between essentially naked ideas with a conventional draping of human voices. The second difficulty is lack of clarity in the symbolic statements. For instance, the Crooms—especially the vehement Nancy—overstress the verbal affectations of Emily Caldwell and thus fail to recognize her candor and vitality, and at the same time they idolize, because he is so "real," Emily's drinking, irresponsible, cunning husband. Is Nancy the Mrs. Pardiggle of *Bleak House*, actuated by an abstract doctrinaire humanitarianism which makes all things clear at a distance, but seriously muddles them in immediate human situations? Various such uncertainties stem either from shadowiness in a character or from apparent inconsistency of character.

To say these things is to record the impressions which are made by Mr. Trilling's fiction *as* fiction. The book has definite intellectual virtues: moderation without flabbiness, gravity without solemnity, conviction with grace and urbanity. There is a fine intelligence rather than an opulent imagination. The statements of motive are lucid and persistent, prying off layer after layer of the ostensible until the reader wonders with John Laskell, "Could no one in these days trust or know his own motives?" In the subtle examinations of the heart there are reminiscences of James, as there are, too, in the technical device of returning to a situation, after it has been formally dismissed, for a rigorous postmortem of discussion or reflection.

The story is concerned with the kinds of position held by intellectuals in the present world. What comes through least ambiguously is the inadequacy of the Crooms, with their unwillingness to face death (they should read Toynbee's *Prothalamium*), their denial of individual guilt, their belief in a Utopian future, their intolerant insistence upon liberal dogmas, and their benevolence of intention which slips over into what we might call goodwillfulness, complacent and intemperate. As characters, they never wholly materialize, but their minds are brilliantly analyzed. Less unmistakable is the treatment of Gifford Maxim, who shocks the others equally by giving up Communism, for which he had done conspiratorial work and, apparently, committed murder, and by becoming religious. He is, says Laskell, "riding the pendulum." Here the allegorical system is complicated, for Maxim is no longer Communist or Neo-Christian, but Opportunist; and certain of his histrionic talents quietly reinforce this character. Trilling has made Maxim more than a melodrama villain, however,

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by giving him a very able mind—perhaps more able than he intended. Yet the problem remains: is the presentation of Maxim as a pendulum-rider intended to impugn the validity of the beliefs which he successively holds? What would be very useful in amplifying the statement of the story would be the presence of non-opportunistic Communists and Christians who would balance the devoted liberalism of the Crooms.

The very use of the term *pendulum* suggests a temporal relativity which raises another problem with respect to this tract for the times. Its evaluations are peculiarly concerned with time. We read repeatedly of "dated" points of view, expressions, ideas, as if the passage of time could invalidate a mode of thought as easily as it does a slang phrase. When Laskell makes a judgment in such terms, we are never sure whether the author is indulgently permitting him an intellectual foible or actually approving his attitude. The approval would certainly be consistent with the placing of the anti-absolutist Laskell in the heroic role. Laskell is the "humanistic critical intelligence," the flexible mind of the Renaissance, the "human being in maturity," the "idea in modulation." He is the non-partisan Enlightenment brought up to date. Whether this is to say that there are no absolutes, that all partisanships are fashions, is not clear. But if the title of the novel alludes to the first line of Dante's *Inferno,* what we have is the *Divine Comedy* with Virgil as hero. We do not go beyond Purgatory. To attempt a further journey is to be a victim of time's casuistry.

Mr. Trilling is concerned with a very important problem: the role of the critical intellect. Is it merely to say no? One senses the danger of being modulated into a decent, discerning negativism, of becoming merely the virtuous outsider. The Crooms and Maxim all accuse Laskell of having no commitment: they speak interestedly, of course, and there is truly a sense in which commitment may become indistinguishable from faddism and hysteria and the will-to-power. But is the alternative to remain wholly uncommitted? Or might not the artist find symbols of a higher, a non-temporal commitment, a commitment to values which demand allegiance without becoming tyrannical?

Yet there is another possibility in the book, a fascinating one: it is that some total sentience in Mr. Trilling has said a little more than his controlling intelligence has intended. For Laskell makes upon us, altogether, an inescapable impression of ineffectuality, of being *always* on the sidelines. He has been half in love with easeful death; he loved Elizabeth but was not "involved" with her; he "loves" Emily but is free of any entanglement with her; he "loves" the child Susan but is not obligated; he approves of certain kinds of political action but does not participate; repeatedly—is Mr. Trilling aware of how frequently?—he speaks of his "utter weariness." Now all this can, of course, be read simply as a symbolic statement both of the dangerous situation of the free mind in our world and of how the free mind *must* conduct itself in order

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not to "acquiesce in . . . its own extinction." But in adapting the fictional form the author commits himself to a whole character who is more than the embodiment of an idea, and the idea suffers the fate of the whole character. Laskell as character falls short of the heroic dimensions of Laskell as free mind; and free mind seems, as a consequence, a somewhat undernourishing diet. If we were to apply the motive-probing in which Mr. Trilling is so brilliant, we might ask what force led him to commit himself to an artistic form which has so severely qualified what appears to be his formal intention.

There is another story latent in the materials, a story suggested by Laskell's phrase "the gift of commitment and virtue." This story would trace out the paradox of participation with which Robert Penn Warren has been concerned: there is purity in being fugitive and cloistered, that is, sterile; and action, which must take place, is inseparable from contamination. If, then, the idea in modulation is categorical, we would have the tragedy of the dévot, who, in his mission, has an excess of the "gift of commitment"; or of the noncombatant who must endure the agony of neutrality instead of undergoing the stirring integration of war. But, if I read him aright, Mr. Trilling is simply setting commitment against detachment. What remains to be set forth is the distinction between the lesser commitment and the greater.

But Laskell fights free of commitments, which appear only as the claims of competing wills. The next phase of the problem is taken up by Sartre. Sartre's Mathieu has also kept his freedom (he and Laskell both decline Communist invitations to activity; both avoid marriage). But his freedom has failed to give meaning to existence, and this meaninglessness is always in the foreground of the first two volumes now available (in Eric Sutton's very convincing English).

Sartre's work brings a familiar dilemma: the fame of a current celebrity fills the air with a thousand little pulls that draw one, almost before he has sensed the ground floating painlessly away from beneath his feet, up toward a good high seat on the bandwagon; and if he tenaciously claws into the elusive earth, resists the persuasions of the times, fights off clique and claque, he is likely to find himself stiffened up into a rigid oppositionism—a sullen recreant. Parades are partly hypnotizing even to the experienced doubter: the flambeaux scatter a deceptive light, and it is hard to judge a float as though it were a car in a garage, and to determine how much steady transportation-value lies beneath that modish tinsel and glitter. This general difficulty is sharpened by the special problem with respect to Sartre: what are said to be the forming ideas of his fiction are already public, so that it is theoretically possible to know in advance what his story does or is intended to do. And the very knowing, one may suppose, makes it a more exacting task to discover what the stories are actually doing, unless one is content, like the student with a handy

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outline of literature, to find what he is supposed to find. It is no less odd, indeed, that a philosophy should have a vogue at all than that the man who is both artist and philosopher should be thought, as artist, to be functioning as if he were still the expounder of a system. If he so functions, and if his intention actually controls his performance, he is defeated before he starts. Regarded only as an existentialist tract, *Les Chemins de la Liberté** would soon become uninteresting—though, outside the immediate critical problem, there does exist the non-literary question of how much the insights of Sartre as artist are sharpened or dimmed by the intellectual positions of Sartre the man.

If, then, we take *The Age of Reason* and *The Reprieve* purely as fiction, if we do not seek doctrinal aids, and if we consider the stories simply as the work of a new writer—we find some real talents, some fundamental borrowings, a considerable maturity, and a limited view of reality which creates a subtle air of confinement. The remainder of the trilogy may necessitate revisions of this estimate, particularly in the final point. In Volume III, presumably, the decisions will be made which will qualify the ideal of freedom: which will prove freedom but resign it, and at the same time bring into being the higher freedom of voluntary commitment. For Sartre's more lucid characters the problem is to decide upon and to perform the self-creating act, to establish the existence of the self; for the reader, the problem is the quality of the creative act. For the will and the mind may be good, but the premises narrow.

Sartre creates a situation or complex of situations with respect to which something must be done, and he skillfully uses, as a heightener of tension, the limitations of time. His own version of the unities is technically very interesting, for it has metaphysical implications. The action of *The Age of Reason* takes place on three days in the summer of 1938; that of *The Reprieve* extends from September 23 through September 30, 1938, the Munich week which was to bring "peace in our time." In the former, Mathieu, the teacher of philosophy who is the main character, wrestles with the situation, pressing and oppressive, brought about by the unwanted pregnancy of his mistress; implicated in the same situation, and at the same time absorbed in problems of their own, are three other principals, all friends of Mathieu—the homosexual Daniel, the student Boris, and Boris's sister Ivich, whom Mathieu believes that he loves; less in the limelight are a half dozen others, variously related to the main characters. For the sake of contrast and irony Sartre shifts from one point of view to another; the action all takes place in Paris. In the second volume the same individuals reappear, but they share attention with several dozen new characters who represent all of Europe; and the action shifts violently from Czecho-Slovakia to North Africa to various parts of France. To these changes from

*A trilogy, of which volumes one and two are here considered.

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the first volume there corresponds a much wider use of colloquialism and slang.

In *The Reprieve* Sartre also shifts point of view, but with such frequency and abruptness—often in mid-sentence—that the immediate effect is one of eccentricity. Yet, except for a belligerent sharpening, the technique is at least as old as Dos Passos' *U. S. A.* and Huxley's *Point Counter Point,* and one soon takes the interruptions as a matter of course. The trouble, however, is that with a few hundred such leaps in the course of a volume the author can make relatively few of them meaningful, and one soon finds coincidence, arbitrariness, and casual verbal liaison—a shock without a sense of revelation. There is always the danger of a breakdown into journalistic vignettes which are illustrative rather than integral; yet Sartre, after a scrambled beginning, and despite an inattentiveness to some characters which leaves them always vague and half-placed, injects enough force into his chief symbolic creatures to give them continuity. At their best the breaks are devices for ironic comment; yet Sartre's most ambitious venture of this sort—the juxtaposing of the violation of Ivich in Paris with the forcing of the settlement upon Czecho-Slovakia—is labored.

Conspicuously in *The Reprieve,* less so in *The Age of Reason,* Sartre writes what has been called the "multiplicity novel"—the unspoken assumption of which is that life is not reducible to a unity. But this assumption Sartre counters, intentionally or not, by writing what may be called the simultaneity novel: unit of time means unity of all places and actions. The unity is that of the historical context shared by all. Whereas in *The Age of Reason* the several main conflicts are essentially internal (the historical reality is introduced by occasional references to the Spanish Loyalists, whom the mythopoeic instinct is transforming into latter-day Trojans), in *The Reprieve* the main conflict is between pre-war Europe and a multitude of insufficient private lives—a formulation of experience to which the technique of simultaneity is well adapted. In thus portraying the moral demand vs. the moral capacity, Sartre tends, at his best, to enlarge the drama to include the general spiritual dilemma of the post-Renaissance world. The threat of war brings on resignation, despair, indifference, mechanical obedience, hope for release from the commonplace, heroics, etc. Behind the immediate response we see laid bare various spiritual states. Fear is virtually endemic. Sadism appears continually. Again and again we find an almost fanatic concern with the self—a desire to escape or establish identity. In ironic juxtaposition with this is the sense of aloneness from which characters constantly suffer (one of the forms of private punishment from which few are exempt). The other side of the solitude theme is the Cain theme: am I my brother's keeper? In a life with such coordinates there is a constant suggestion of death. But the motif which is closest to the center of the story is freedom: in *The Reprieve* it is less a conscious preoccupation than in *The Age of Reason,* yet it is apparent that what in midsummer is Mathieu's obsession,

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indeed his pedantry, becomes, in September, the unapprehended spiritual state of everybody. Mathieu's ideal is freedom to make a choice, to make it with reason, desire, and belief, to have lucidity, and not to be fooled. But for the detached man ever in search of the perfect choice, life is full of ironies. Mathieu's detachment becomes a meaningless vacuum, and his daily movements are subject to the very impulses which he would escape. Thus his rationalism brings him close to the great irrational multitudes who move from impulse to impulse and, without any major direction or conviction, seize from life what they can, here and there. With only enough exceptions to point the issue, they want to be free—free, that is, of any major external discipline—to muddle along in a continuum of aimless sensations (sex, drink, the usual, sadism, heroics, etc.), The "reprieve" offered by Munich is therefore not only a defeating anti-climax but an evil disguised as a blessing: they are the more lost because they are saved. Sartre makes an antiphonal connection between the final words of the two volumes. Of the French, reprieved from un-freedom and rejoicing, Daladier says, "The God-damned fools"; of himself, as he arrives, presumably, at an insight into some of the paradoxes of the life of freedom, Mathieu says, "I have attained the age of reason." Brunet has said to him, ". . . you will be the slave of your own freedom," and Mathieu later says, ". . . freedom is exile, and I am condemned to be free."

In a sense Sartre's dissolution of experience into innumerable component units is, as well as a consciously chosen method, a recognition of his own gifts: for it is in the imparting of vitality to the individual scene or moment that his talents especially appear. To the separate act of horror, of exhibitionism, of sadism, of commitment, of histrionics, of penance, of an invalid's "horizontal" thinking, he can give sharp reality; his imagery is copious, startling, well controlled. Yet, despite some effective symbols, there is an impression of naturalistic flatness. Volume two has more of an air of excitement, perhaps, with its more inclusive external pressures, and the more numerous panels of action; but volume one gains strength from its concentration upon a few highly self-conscious individuals. But even here we see Sartre's dissolving tendency: he breaks situations up into multitudes of almost aimlessly conflicting ingredients, and personalities into a hodge-podge of diverse motives. Of the complexity of character and circumstance we are always aware.

This centrifugal quality of the work frames the final question: what is the ultimate level on which all the parts are reassembled, and the diverse scenes composed into meaning? In *The Reprieve* we have a juxtaposing of fragments in time—which, as a formal unification, produces an accumulation rather than a synthesis. In *The Age of Reason* there is a curious method which is puzzling at first but which, on inspection, turns out to be a clear expression of the

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author's attitude to his materials and to his world. All the resolutions are made in terms of a neatly manipulated situation. On various occasions throughout the book we become aware of Sartre's gift for tightly knit melodrama; and his care for the unities, and reminders of the stage are overwhelming; there is a large finesse in the preparation of objects and scenes to be used later, in the management of time by which the strands of private existences are brought together at effectively right or wrong moments. The action of the last fifty pages proceeds tensely from one carefully prepared surprise and shock to another, from reversal to discovery, until a climactic event brings peace amid apparently insoluble complications. *The Age of Reason* turns into a *well-made play*.

What the well-made play as a form says, I take it, is that all the components of experience are tangible, accountable, manageable (the form develops late in the Faustian era). There is nothing intangible, imponderable, transcendental; the day of *dei ex machinis* is gone. Such a method makes life orderly—but at the danger of making it trivial. Now one does not apply such an adjective to Sartre's world; but the fact is that ultimately his creatures do seem to be undergoing a total immersion in the surface of things. One has always the faint, but inescapable, feeling that what goes on in *The Age of Reason*, and what is aspired to by the actors, somehow fails of final importance, and that in *The Reprieve* the impulse toward a meta-topical, spiritual significance, falls a little short (the historical is so close that the novel draws heavily upon a specially prepared receptiveness). Many seek and suffer; the naturalistic playing-down is so used as to accommodate a good deal of agonized canvassing of the psyche; some consciences are relentless. Yet the reality which the characters encounter, and we through them, is bounded; consciousness is circumscribed. With all the vitality there is something claustral. All the individual can do is pull himself up by his own bootstraps; the atmosphere is that of a frustrating secular puritanism. One does not call this trivial; but it leaves too much out.

A possible exception is Daniel, so far the most interesting character in the story. In him there are ironic ambiguities: his self-hatred turns into sadism, and his sadism is not always distinguishable from good will; by withholding financial aid he increases Mathieu's difficulties, then he solves them by an expiatory sacrifice; to Marcelle he is always "archangel," but he calls himself "a fallen archangel . . . Lucifer," and elsewhere he is called "demoniac" and "Satanic." At one point he thinks of himself as Cain; at another, the words *Eli, eli, lamma sabacthani* float in the air near him. Daniel's climactic experience is his vision of being seen by God—an experience which is an important element in the elaborate contrapuntal theme of being-seen. On one side is a recurrent dread of light which for various characters symbolizes, apparently, a shrinking from the perception of their own reality; on the other, a frequent

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sensation of being seen and of thereby having a personal identity established. "I am seen, therefore I am." The desire thus *to be* takes various forms: exhibitionism, confession, and, for Daniel, the mystical vision. To Mathieu, Daniel writes a letter which is at once an account of his vision and a jibing at Mathieu's rational positivism. Mathieu calls it, ". . . trite rambling!" Elsewhere Mathieu says that to understand the war, "You would have to be everywhere. . . . War . . . is everywhere . . . ; but no one is there to add it up. It exists solely for God. But God does not exist."

What Sartre will make of the issue between positivist and mystic remains to be seen. So far it is not even a central issue. The foreground issue is liberalism, and we wait also to see upon what terms it will mature by qualification or renunciation. In the meantime Daniel has shown one way of breaking the bonds of immediate circumstance which confine the story.

To Toynbee the breaking of bonds would be irrelevant because the bonds themselves are only decorations on the wheel of cosmic history. He is, then, a philosopher of history. Although on the title page it is called a "novel" and although it has the typographical arrangement of prose, *Prothalamium* is actually a philosophic poem; thus, as in several details, it is reminiscent of Broch's *The Death of Virgil*. But precisely because it is a poem—compact, symbolic, multileveled, all details woven elaborately into the meaning pattern ——it cannot be totally accounted for as yet. What the analyst must do is establish critically, if it can be done, the functional relevance of innumerable details of the execution, especially of the mythic ingredients which account for the subtitle, "A Cycle of the Holy Graal."

Without an elaborate *explication de texte*, what is clear is that the "story" works on at least three levels: that of the foreground situation, that of the mythic background, and that of cosmic reality. In the foreground we have an account of a tea-party (a kind of Last Supper), where a tea-cup is broken, and where the guests, in whom we see different vital forces and attitudes, clash in different ways, and whence, after disillusioning views of themselves in a mirror, they depart. The beautiful youth, Noel Tillett, who leaves when the cup is broken, reappears upon the death of old Father Morton. The mythical level becomes evident in the recollections of different characters and most conspicuously, of course, in the motif of the Dying God which animates the story of Father Morton. The intertwining of these differing realities is paralleled by the technical device of juxtaposing commonplace realism, everyday psychology, and conventional prose with excursions into apparent fantasy, puzzles in character, and all the devices available to the poet. Toynbee never permits the reader to relax but demands his continued high cooperation. And at the same time the shocks

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which he administers are a way of saying that not all things are what they seem: "Life isn't like that."

For the tea-party is an allegorical version of life, with its main anthropological lines carefully drawn. The hostess is the mother whom one may return to, infantwise, or reject. A central human antiphony appears in Max and Tom Ford: Max ("Weeper") is the man of cultivation and memory, looking backward, returning to the womb, the south, the past; Tom ("Airgun") is the doctor, the competent man of action, conquering the barren north, turning forward to the future, embodying the life force, the spirit of progress. Billy, the problem child, is to others "the angry shame of recent birth"; he is "Fate and the lie, and the little cornered courage of the ignorant." Charlie Parsley, the cynical laugher (one is reminded of the treatment of laughter in Broch), is Mephistopheles, Iago, hate, "the very principle of destruction." Miss Black is fanatic, parsonolatrous, taking ecclesiasticism for the ultimate reality, hating fertility, yet imparting "a strange vitality to all who watch. . . . " All the characters go through their "dance"—a symbol of the patterned, circular movement of existence; they "dance the old steps, yet confident that all's spontaneous, all's extempore, that now they might do this, now that." All, in other words, are part of a scheme, and the scheme is objectified in two characters who exist both independently and as aspects of the minds of the others: Noel Tillett and Father Morton. Noel, as Youth, leaves when the cup breaks and winter winds are felt; then enters Father Morton (la mort?)—age, dogma, the status quo, institutions growing corrupt; regarded by others, according to their temperaments, as the kind old man or the tempter; possessing knowledge that he is not final. Upon his death (facilitated by Tom), Noel again enters —the "birth," spring, resurrection, the second coming, the inevitable return of youth, ready for another dance and able in its purity to take the Graal. For "nothing stays"; life, in the words of the popular song, "goes round and round"; the characters are "poor totem repetitions"; and man's "sad nobility" is "to create a moment's uncertainty where everything is certain." The work becomes, then, an ironic contemplation of recurrence (projecting, as a philosophy of history, a certain filial impiety), and particularly of the anguish of the transitory figures who believe themselves absolute. The lesson, to our Father Morton phase of the cycle, is this: forget today's anguish, for tomorrow you will start afresh, fit for the Graal—until it breaks. And, oddly enough, certain symbols suggest a specifically English orientation of the fable and therefore a quiet reassurance in nationalistic terms.

This preliminary report upon *Prothalamium* is necessarily rough and unmodulated, and it hardly does justice to the poetic brilliance with which very complex materials are assembled and made to modify each other. Toynbee appropriately organizes his narrative according to units of time; the re-telling

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of the story from the points of view of different characters is a good device not only for making each participant concrete but also for compelling the rereading that brings into focus all the suggestions, images, and symbols that have been used. The changes of style that accompany the changes from one narrator to another are in the main successful—decidedly so for Charlie Parsley. But at times, as a part of the calculated effect, Toynbee falls into an iambic prose which to me is as painful as that of Lillo and Lamb. In the final section, in which the narration is done by Tillett, Father Morton, and then Tillett again, the main interpretative cues are given. Here some fine poetry is combined with some awkard exposition: it's a bit reminiscent of the pageant in which the maiden clad in corn-silk announces, "I am the spirit of autumn." Perhaps the pointing and the underscoring might have been done in part outside the body of the work—in, for instance, such notes as are appended to *The Waste Land.*

The employment of several levels of meaning, particularly the utilization of materials from legend and myth, and the merging of poetic and prose techniques, is leading to the creation of a new, identifiable genre. We see comparable patterns of structure in Eliot, Joyce, Broch, Malcolm Lowry, and now Toynbee. What is indicated is the insufficiency of the novel form, as it has evolved from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, for the expression of truth in terms of modern tensions; if the present development continues, the conventional novel will disappear, at least as a serious form of communication. What it indicated by the reliance upon mythic heroes is the unavailability of adequately representative characters in modern life—characters who become, so to speak, categories of experience. For one of the results of the fragmentation of life is the dissolution of man into men; and since the artist is concerned with man, he is driven to new expedients to find and set forth a characteristic wholeness. And with wholeness of man, wholeness of life. For surely what is indicated by the fusion of different times in a single dramatic narrative is a sense of the identity of comparable parts, of the "simultaneity" of chronologically distinct periods of time. This is one possible approach to meaning, perhaps a necessary one in a "late" phase. If it admits and indeed underscores the poverty of the present, it also brings, just to the fringe of consciousness, a gleam of the distant organic relief from the present.

Mr. Toynbee reminds us of the eventual answer to the problem of celebrities Man proposes celebrities, cycles dispose of them.

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A Complex Fate

KATHERINE HOSKINS

THE JAMES FAMILY by *F. O. Matthiessen*
Alfred A. Knopf. $6.75
THE NOTEBOOKS OF HENRY JAMES
Edited by *F. O. Matthiessen* and *Kenneth B. Murdock*
Oxford University Press. $6.00

IN *THE JAMES FAMILY*, Mr. F. O. Matthiessen has certainly started out with a large and interesting initial conception: that a biography of this family that took pen in hand on every occasion "becomes also a comprehensive anthology." The wit and expository brilliance possible in such a treatment shows at its best perhaps in the juxtaposition of three accounts of Emerson by Henry and William James and by their father. And in the chapter entitled "Europe and/or America," we find a lively family conversation extending over many years. Mr. Matthiessen claims to be like a director of a play who has only to fit together various significant manuscripts and then sit back and let his actors do the rest. But instead of sitting back he has shown a good deal of alacrity to accept other possible functions such as scene shifter, lighting expert and persuasive chorus. It often seems that his case might have been better served by a more pedestrian chronology, a more austere offering of complete letters, and a little less of himself. Yet this complaint is made in ignorance of what arid wastes the collection of the Houghton library may also include and that Mr. Matthiessen has spared us. The book does hew to a line through what must have been an often bewildering mass of material and thus constitutes a very considerable work of the spirit, to say nothing of the flesh; and it is enormously interesting on many counts.

In detail it is, of course, of the highest amusement to recognize the cripple of *The Princess Casamassima* in the admired sister Alice; to regret, after reading his diatribe on Emerson, that Henry James senior did not devote himself to the nature of North American morals and letters rather than to the nature of deity. The theme of the book and much of its extraordinary interest lie in the drama of development of the fantastical father and his two sons whom Mr. Matthiessen rather modestly claims to be "among the most magnificent productions of our American nineteenth century." With these we glimpse the artist *manqué* who took to drink, the other son's obscure mediocrity and the witty and beautiful daughter's varied illnesses—rich material for pondering Mencken's three accidents of "birth, environment and education." What further emerges, though indirectly yet with ever increasing clarity from these

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packed pages is a huge exposition, a writing out in large and with figures of what Henry James, the novelist, described as "the complex fate of being an American." More and more as the book progresses, these three men whom we have accepted as sports in American life seem arch-typically to embody tendencies and difficulties that have beset all Americans who have, if only for a few wondering moments, lifted their noses out of the hog trough of daily life.

Henry James senior, son of an Irish immigrant, and wealthy, springs into view obsessed with God and education as if his fore-fathers had founded the Bay Colony. It is doctrine by intuition and education by experiment such as we have all suffered and profited from since the country was started. Mr. Matthiessen suggests that with the old gentleman constantly fulminating on the good life and constantly lifting the children from one school to another, the tension of the house must have been great, the air rarefied, the children thrown much on themselves rather than on society. He might have gone on to note that all this rarefaction was probably tremendously increased in effect by the fact that it does not seem to have existed, for the particular family, beyond the one household. Man, and children with especial ease, can get acclimated to high places. It is changes of pressure that hurt and strain. And this continual change in intellectual and spiritual pressures, this isolation into family are conditions of life for any American brought up in even so mild a degree of rarefaction as might be expressed by the phrase 'different from.'

The children were all quite young when the father decided to take them abroad in order that they might have, in his famous phrase, "a more sensuous education" than that the States could offer. Though the adjective was in common use throughout the century yet, remembering that Keats was able to use *sensual* quite simply and without licentious connotations, I feel justified in finding it one of those bowdlerizations of thought so dear to the euphemistic Anglo-American and so deadly to his life. No sooner do we get our heads clear of the hog trough than we arrogate the Empyrean. And though the God and life of Henry James senior were a good deal more robust than those of Emerson, say, he does not seem to have walked the earth as his home. And he seems to have been altogether ready to accept the practice that so long as God and virtue are safe in the sunny American skies, the cream of humane activity may very well be left across the ocean where we will hope to skim it at our leisure, exercising of course every care to avoid the milk of sensuality. At any rate, in the James household we are told of no striving for beauty in the matter of decoration. We have no idea that Mrs. James beguiled her sons' senses with pretty clothes and perfumes. Though the elder James knew painters and William even started to become one, we hear of no new and exciting pictures on the walls. We hear no sound of music. Any richness of sensation, any acceptance of and insistence on art as a means of life is put

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off until the Puritan word-culture has had its way; until, to the tune of that "arduous optimism" that William James noted of his father, they are fixed in loneliness of spirit and in the little white house of civic and domestic morality, the two aspects of American life to strike every European as prime factors in our "complex fate." Then they go to Europe.

It was the best that Henry senior could do and it has remained too generally the best that we can do, and the problem is exacerbated now in that we cannot do even that. And still the thirst for the "other" life is attested to by every American who has ever been to Europe or who merely has ever read about it. In Henry and William James, the thirst was titanic and the struggle to compose the needs for home and abroad was titanic also. As the brothers argue with each other and themselves—evaluating so carefully and eloquently, with justices loving and damning and with precisions that should make their successors on the theme hang down their heads in shame—it is truly as if they were doing it once and for all for all of us. And it is a struggle whose validity is by no means impaired by the realization that this "other" world is not in Europe either ("O, London, are you too impossible?" Henry James could cry) but in some "great good place" whose component parts and residents are scattered through the ages and whose keystone went down with Atlantis.

William James accepted the logic of this realization and plumped for America. Following the "romantic" pattern as described by Santayana, he presents the American man of genius as we are familiar with him. Henry James chose Europe as holding at least a few more relics of the world he wanted. And in his "classic" solution, one act following surely and strongly on the next, he shows us the American man of genius as he can be. Though he seems rare in his choices, his rarity lies chiefly in his aesthetic stamina. Both before and after him our history is strewn with wrecks of artists who have wanted beyond the naturalism that our dry air and dryer society have seemed to make inevitable and who have fallen afoul of preciosity and the picturesque.

Henry James chose Europe, as Mr. Matthiessen shows, in full knowledge that he was thereby giving up much of the artist's treasure of childhood. But it was a childhood of few friends and of no cultural ties to speak of. Possibly Salem-Boston, possibly the plantation South might have held him. But the myths were fading fast even then. Almost a prophetic instinct seems at work in his choosing conditions that would lead to the abstraction that the fading of myth everywhere has forced on his successors.

We find him in Paris at the age of twenty-six, a lonely, disapproving, thirsty young American of letters, not precocious, not altogether sympathetic. His disapproval covered the whole range of European morals with the one, and as it was to prove, vital exception of their attitude towards art. His loneliness was barren, at least in its expression, of the educative misery that young Euro-

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pean artists have recorded of their first immersion in the city of their dreams. James' *cri de coeur* is a mild complaint that he has only waiters to talk with. He was, of course, cushioned by money; but he was more potently ham-strung by the old "arduous optimism" that is the curse as well as the strength of his countrymen. And years later he could write to his brother, "I was lost in the wonder of the extent to which all my life I have (like M. Jourdain) unconsciously pragmatized." In the matter of morals, the typically American ambivalence to the European mother was also to stay with him all his life. It is true that he never ceased to object to the pudicity of the Anglo-American novel and he came to extend his condemnation of editorial queasiness before adultery to a condemnation of the whole Anglo-American sexual set-up, at least as it cramped his writing. Yet, at forty-three, he could write so perplexedly to Howells apropos of Daudet, Goncourt and Zola, ". . . there is nothing more interesting to me now than the effort and experiment of this little group, with its truly infernal intelligence of art, form, manner—its intense artistic life. They do the only kind of work today that I respect; and in spite of their ferocious pessimism and their handling of unclean things, they are at least serious and honest." *Tout bon américain,* James matured with exasperating slowness; but maturity for him meant that rarest and most difficult of syntheses, of the American with the artist.

The face of his middle years shows the marks of his fight for maturity. The huge and wondering eyes of the boy have become markedly inquisitive and searching, the forehead has bulged and though the mouth is delicate and unstrained, the face as a whole is that of a man who has known many grave difficulties and sorrows, if not violent passions, and who has held through them to his own obstinate devices. And his devices changed wonderfully from a mere moralistic contrast of national characteristics to a most sensitive consideration of good and evil. His optimism was proven and hardened so that the free spirit who at first foundered, then for a long time bowed down in renunciation in Isabel Archer and so many others, was prepared to stand straight in Lambert Strether to reject, and at long last, in Maggie Verver, was able to seize power and use it. Moreover, through all his middle and later work flows persistently the impression that, though he took considerable pains to cloak it, James knew everything. It is an impression that looms as mysteriously as the sombre *bons bourgeois* in La Grande Jatte and by means of as exact a pointillisme.

Sources for his knowledge, direct causes for his heroic self-development are not unearthed even by Mr. Matthiessen's diggings. Like his father, like his brother, he experienced an early descent into the depths. Henry James' descent took place at the moment almost of the firing on Ft. Sumter and he later felt the coincidence of symbolic portent. The events threw man and

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nation profoundly out of gear and threatened both with impotence if they did not temporarily induce it. However, considering the to-do that has been made about James' accident, I feel justified in reviving a Civil War chestnut to remark that if James was impotent, then we had better emasculate all American artists. On the face of the man, at least, the indications are of persisting strength. He could write to Grace Norton, "Sorrow comes in great waves . . . but it rolls over us, and though it may almost smother us it leaves us on the spot, and we know that if it is strong we are stronger, inasmuch as it passes and we remain. It wears us, uses us, but we wear it and use it in return; and it is blind whereas we, after a manner see." Yet neither in his life nor in his work is there any extended or explicit statement of a philosophy, no general ideas or truths that he wishes to display. Such of his essay "Is there a Life After Death?" as Mr. Matthiessen has included seems to be a playful defense of his perfect willingness to do without any such. Indeed, his innocence of ideas has been commented on in high places. Nor is there any indication that he ever penetrated far into the depths again as he might have by a dynamic love, poverty, threat of death, or religious upheaval. Nor have we greater heights than strong family ties and a social life that gained zest mainly from being a triumph of acclimatization. Such a dull life, it seems.

It is only when we read the Notebooks that we realize what an intense life he created inside that banal core.

Here, off and on from 1878 to 1911, we see James interrogating not his thoughts but his characters. Himself camped safely on the edge of the abyss, as it were, he sends them down into it and questions them closely on their return. With information gained from earlier characters, he can instruct later ones to go farther in exploration; from their reports he can extend his cartography and make it increasingly accurate. He send them back again and again, holds them delicately and probes and learns. He takes time out to discuss a cold, his lack of work accomplished and then, "*Ah, que de choses à faire*" exults and proceeds on his interrogation with all formality. The formality is so great that we often yearn for one of Chekhov's brevities, "Two young officers in stays." But James, as always, wins in the end and we cannot choose but hear. "Then comes the little denouement. Isn't the little denouement, must it *not* only be, that some horrid danger becomes real again, some old menace or interruption comes back out of the past? The little safeties and pleasures are at an end. What I seem to see is that somebody, a fatal somebody, turns up. *Voyons*:—I seem to see something like an old fellow whose *wife* turns up . . ." and on and on. Obviously, James could not have *ideas* when he thought fictionally, as a musician thinks musically.

It is still Mr. Matthiessen who edits this phase of James, now with the aid of Mr. Kenneth Murdock of *The New England Quarterly*. And, after looking

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at a sample of James' hand-writing on the dust cover, it is impossible not to admire their performance of an onerous, if always rewarding task. Unfortunately, I find it also impossible not to find them guilty of a gross error in taste and judgment when they elected to interrupt the flow of the Notebooks with their own descriptions of how each projected tale finally turned out. They have undoubtedly aided future thesis writers with their trots; they have also done an able best to ruin the Notebooks. Perhaps they would not have been so brash if it had ocurred to them that James may have *allowed* them to survive. For it is hard to believe that he should not have recognized them as a literary form, a dramatization of the act of writing. They are often quaint, stiff with the diffidence of an artist who does not know that his true audience is barely born. (He had never the self-confidence of a Stendhal to make himself at home in the future). Yet they foreshadow, with an odd modernity for this 'classicist,' the methods of Gide wherein the author and his problems share the field with the characters when they do not take it over altogether. It is not with the patently public quality of Gide's Notebooks that they have most in common but with the more intimate, though directed, spontaneity of Edouard and *Le Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs.*

James had by no means the breadth of interests of Gide; the only two subjects in his Notebooks are, for all practical purposes, James and his characters. But he was incomparably the greater novelist and it is of extreme interest to follow his meticulous notation of each nuance of character meaning. It really doesn't matter at all whether we know the story he is talking about or not; the interest is in the action presented. Yet there is, naturally, a particular charm to coming on the first speculations that led to works we do recognize. And this is especially true in regard to the last three novels.

Messrs. Matthiessen and Murdock have imaginatively allowed the Notebooks to culminate in the elaborate scenario for *The Ambassadors* that James wrote for his publishers. It becomes the culmination of dramatic force when we realize that the end of *The Ambassadors* as it was finally printed is so much weaker (in his familiar vein of renunciation) than the end he projected for it. In the scenario, Strether by no means gives up Miss Gostrey, he absolutely doesn't want her. James writes of him, "He has come so far through his total little experience that he has come out on the other side—on the other side, even, of union with Miss Gostrey. He must go back as he came—or rather, really, so quite other that, in comparison, marrying Miss Gostrey would be almost of the old order." No mention here of that nebulous 'right' that makes so irritating a finish to an almost perfect book. Here, as it seems to me, is the first indication of the change that lifts *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl* so far above even their immediate predecessor. Lambert Strether did much for James. It may well have been he who weaned him

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finally from those ambiguous ghosts he had loved to conjure; and it certainly seems to have been he who finally recommended the adequacy of the living personality and the light of day. It is as if Strether led James to this change, but James could not use it in *The Ambassadors* because he had not provided for it in Strether, had not given him a big enough experience to justify it.

At any rate, not by way of theory which might have got him there quicker, but by the integrity of his devotion to his characters, James won free of his brilliant but in a way frivolous as too rigidly 'scientific' pointillisme and approached an intellectual and moral relationship of planes. In the last half of *The Golden Bowl* his ends become wholly consonant with his means and, appealing on all sides to the sensibilities of man as he might develop them, he shed the old solicitations to the old patterns of reaction and produced the nearest thing to an abstract novel that was to be seen in many years. (And at that it took a Frenchman, as James doubtless could have told us that it *would* take one, to produce it in *La Peste.*)

Perhaps, however, the most real value of the Notebooks is private to ourselves. For here, as nowhere else, do we see the man James. We see him wistful and fatuous; we see him struggling with indolence and with the knowledge of failure. We see him almost wallowing in the happiness of work: "The thing will come, will arrive 'in its glory'; the quiet, generous, patient mornings will bring it. . . . Oh, sacred beneficence of doing. . . . Consider many things and open the hospitable mind! Look at this, judge of that and turn over the other!" And as we follow him on these mornings of work, we concede a certain rightness to his belittling the loneliness of his tourist youth as if it had been in foreknowledge that he would have far greater loneliness to endure. As we hear him talking to himself because there wasn't anybody else in the world——not even his beloved brother—*to* talk to; we realize that he escaped the physical isolation of the artist in America to arrive at the absolute loneliness of the dedicated artist anywhere; the loneliness that, in the final democracy of the spirit is indistinguishable from that of any man who has got within sight of the limits of his development.

We saw James at twenty-six, a not unusually gifted young American of letters. The Notebooks offer proof of how the letters were his stringent salvation. They enabled, they forced him to extend his optimism to the pitch of greatness, his colonial loneliness to that of the grown-up man. Perhaps more than any one triumph, this discipline won for our gratitude a sight of our little white house of virtue so rationally extended to our possibilities, so sinuously moulded with the landscape, so courageous to the cold and receptive of the sun as to align it far more with a possible architectural future than with the galleried old castles of the past that James went out to seek.

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Criticism from England

FREDERICK MORGAN

EXPLORATIONS, by *L. C. Knights*. Geo. W. Stewart. $3.00
REVALUATION, by *F. R. Leavis*. Geo. W. Stewart. $3.75
SEVEN TYPES OF AMBIGUITY, by *William Empson*. New Directions (importer). $4.00
THE POETIC IMAGE, by *Cecil Day Lewis*. Oxford. $2.50

AT THE OUTSET, one should indicate one's gratitude to George W. Stewart, for affording Mr. Leavis and Mr. Knights American publication, and to New Directions, for importing the reissue of Mr. Empson's *Seven Types*. Mr. Empson's books, which made a considerable impression on their first appearance in this country, have long been out of print; whereas Mr. Leavis and Mr. Knights have hitherto been inadequately represented by occasional articles in our reviews. If one regrets being unable to extend so warm a welcome to the fourth critic on our list, at least we may find that in his confusions he may be made to point a moral or two.

Ours is an age of criticism, it is often said; and provided there is no implied antithesis ("Ours is *not* an age of artistic creation"), one can agree with this statement as far as it goes. And in a sense the statement has its truth in that we live in so uncritical an age. Values fluctuate, modes of knowledge conflict and overlap, and the mind of man loses its delicacy and discernment and feeds upon indigestibles. For, as the discriminatory powers of the total man recede, criticism works overtime to pick up the pieces. The relationship is ambivalent: the welter to some extent produces the criticism, but the criticism inevitably imposes its order upon some of the welter. In so far as the greatest order is that which is imposed upon the greatest chaos—so that it required God to order ultimate chaos—it is possible that our criticism may have rather fine things in store. Nor is a fundamental dualism implied here; chaos is a perversion of order; the values which sustain order, always present, may be only partially or imperfectly recognized. Dr. Johnson lived and wrote within the terms of an order that we have come to call 'Augustan', a limited order for which, most of us agree, no nostalgia should be entertained; the limitations of his compre-

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hension of Shakespeare and the metaphysicals are notorious, yet he is undeniably a great critic. The achievement of the criticism of our own time has been, by fixing our attention upon the unmitigated values of art, to foreshadow a more profound order.

In the work of Mr. Leavis and Mr. Knights the impulse towards order is strong, and the order is valid in that it is implied, not by exclusion, but by a sensitive awareness of value where it is present. As Mr. Knights says in his preface: "The only merit I should care to claim for these essays is that they do attempt to keep in the forefront of attention the primary impact of the works they discuss, so that if the reader disagrees with any particular judgment he is at least invited to formulate his disagreement in terms of the primary impact on *him*—not in terms of general notions and abstract ideas." It is worth noting that such a method, even in the hands of an inferior critic (which is certainly not the case here), could do little damage, as it would continually refer back to the "primary impact"; where real damage may be done is by criticism (like that of Mr. Day Lewis, to be considered further on) which obtrudes a muddle of semi-relevant generalities between the reader and his primary experience. Mr. Leavis and Mr. Knights should have a salutary effect upon all such muddles; one would like, for example, to prescribe them as required reading in schools and colleges. They have been blamed in some quarters for traveling on the momentum originally supplied by T. S. Eliot; but assuming the value of the initial impulse, it is as unfair to blame them for following it as it is to imply that their contribution is not, to a high degree, peculiarly their own. The real point is that Mr. Leavis and Mr. Knights, both in their writings and as editors of *Scrutiny* (probably the leading English literary magazine, and all too little known in this country), have done an important job, which, for a variety of reasons, the best American critics have approached far less systematically or not at all.

Mr. Leavis' book, subtitled 'Tradition and Development in English Poetry', deals with poetry from the Seventeenth Century to Keats, and is a remarkably sustained achievement. At every point one is aware of a delightful and stimulating congruence, a congruence that is part and parcel of the writer's fine sensibility and intelligent perception. Again and again, Mr. Leavis sends one back, stimulated and refreshed, to the text of the poets. At his best, as in the essays on Pope and on Wordsworth, his insights are so compelling as to require of his reader a new reading of what had seemed to be familiar material. Mr. Leavis is a firm advocate of the 'Shakespearean' tradition, as opposed to the 'Miltonic'; this preoccupation, on the whole justified, operates, in the chapter on Milton, and particularly in the note on *Samson Agonistes*, as a limitation on his sensibility: the myth of the 'grand style' is exploded, and quite properly, but what is valuable in Milton's achievement is not adequately

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explained.* On the other hand, if the essay on Shelley seems comparatively uninteresting, it is probably due to the inferiority of its subject: one has only to register agreement with Mr. Leavis' disagreements (and even here, one is struck by the brilliant and just appreciation of *The Masque of Anarchy*). Mr. Leavis' discrimination works to good effect in the more general chapters, those on *The Line of Wit* and *The Augustan Tradition*. Such general topics would spell sudden death to the usual academic critic; Mr. Leavis avoids easy historical abstractions, stays close to the concrete, and draws valid conclusions. The most remarkable essay of all, to my mind, is that on Wordsworth, which seems definitive and of lasting value. It is particularly worth noting here how Mr. Leavis has absorbed Mr. Empson's *Tintern Abbey* investigations and adapted them to a wider context; and how, in a note on one of the 'Lucy' poems, he has given a searching analysis of a type of poetry that has seemed inaccessible to contemporary criticism.

Mr. Knights' *Explorations*, because it is rather a collection of essays than a work unified about a central theme, does not, perhaps, make as powerful a cumulative effect as Mr. Leavis' book. But it too is, on the whole, a brilliant performance that sends one back with renewed delight to the objects of its criticism. This is particularly true of the essays on Shakespeare's Sonnets, on Bacon and on Herbert. I have seen a criticism of Mr. Knights' work that implies he should not have been content simply to chronicle Mr. Eliot's "dissociation of sensibility"; but surely the real point to be made is that the Bacon essay is one of the outstanding achievements of contemporary criticism, for the light it throws both on its subject and on the history of our language. Similarly, the piece on Herbert should serve to forcibly direct our attention upon a poet who has at least as much contemporary significance as Donne or Blake.

Half of the book is Shakespeare criticism. In *How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth*, the earliest of these essays and one on which the author expresses some reservations in his preface, Mr. Knights attacks certain dominant heresies of Shakespeare interpretation, and reaffirms the primacy of the poetry (and in so doing gives the best elucidation I know of the puzzling Malcolm-Macduff scene). But for all one's sympathy with Mr. Knights' aims, it is apparent that there is danger of narrowness here. Bradley, for all his excesses, cannot be so

* The entire concept of the Miltonic tradition needs overhauling. It is surely Spenser's and Marlowe's tradition as well as Milton's, and, as Mr. John Crowe Ransom and other critics have pointed out, it is absorbed, along with everything else, by Shakespeare. (This fact causes one to doubt the validity of a direct Shakespeare-Milton opposition). The Miltonic perversions and excesses need to be distinguished from the Miltonic achievements. Mr. Leavis implies throughout a distinction between the 'pure' Spenserian and the Miltonic traditions, but he does not develop it; and this, to some extent, limits the validity of his essay on Keats.

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easily disposed of as he is in these pages; and it is disconcerting to find Mr. Knights condemning the approach by way of "character" here, and then applying it himself (with an underpinning of poetic analysis) in the later essay, *Prince Hamlet*. For although Mr. Knights tries to account for this by implying that different approaches may be relevant to different plays, one is not convinced: what seems to be needed is an account of the relationships of the poetry to the concept of "character", and of both to the total action, or effect, of the play. And it seems important to remember that since the plays were, after all, written to be produced, to be grasped in terms of spectacle and motion as well as language, — the poetry may be the chief, but is not the sole contributing factor to the total aesthetic effect.

The essay on *Hamlet* seems to me the only really unsatisfactory one in the book: here, and here only, Mr. Knights' exploration is of territory already occupied by Mr. Eliot; and the play is not grasped in full. Also disappointing, in view of Mr. Knights' total achievement, are the pieces on James and on Yeats. The former simply does not go far enough; the latter is weakened by an uncertainty of intention that is too eager to read a romantic instability into Yeats' work. But despite these objections, enough has been said to indicate the great merits of Mr. Knights' work. In addition to the essays already mentioned, the volume offers *Notes on a Marxian View of the Seventeenth Century*, a brisk attack on Restoration Comedy, and one of those articles on correlation of studies which, one hopes, may eventually move the universities to constructive action.

Mr. Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, now reissued, has influenced an entire generation of writers and already become a part of our critical heritage. Under the circumstances, I shall limit myself to a few remarks of the most general nature. It is one of the most powerful works of criticism to appear in our century, and indispensable for those who wish to fully understand contemporary criticism and the resources of the English language. It is also a difficult book; in some respects, unnecessarily so. Mr. John Crowe Ransom, in *The New Criticism*, has indicated some of the puzzling features of Mr. Empson's classification of ambiguities. It appears to me, perhaps because of a deficiency of training in semantics, that the entire superstructure of the book is unnecessary and unconvincing; or, at best, a convenience only. But the great value of Mr. Empson's work lies not in his 'system', but in the rich mass of poetic material which is painstakingly analyzed in illustration of the various types of ambiguity. And even here one must be on one's guard, as Mr. Empson's tendency is to dig so deeply into grammatical and syntactical possibilities that one loses sight of one's critical objectives. The work that is accomplished here, however, is so vast and so important that our reservations should not, after all, get in the way of our getting all we can from Mr.

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Empson. And in all fairness, it must be added that the great majority of his analyses are criticism of a very high order, an intensive criticism that is loath to evaluate, but that makes intelligent evaluation more possible. A careful reading of *Seven Types of Ambiguity* will permanently enlarge one's understanding of, and 'feel' for the language.

If space permitted, I should have liked to include in this review a comparison between Mr. Empson's treatment of some particular poet and that of Mr. Leavis or Mr. Knights. I can only suggest it to the reader as an extremely interesting and profitable exercise. I have already mentioned Wordsworth in dealing with Mr. Leavis' book. One could also compare Mr. Leavis' chapter on Pope with the various references in *Seven Types*, and one could compare Mr. Empson with Mr. Knights on Shakespeare's Sonnets and on Herbert.

If Mr. Leavis and Mr. Knights may be compared to industrious and devoted gardeners who can account for the blooming of the rose, and Mr. Empson to another, equally devoted gardener, digging fiercely in the rich soil, Mr. Day Lewis is the country-house owner, in white flannels and blazer, who shows his guests about the garden but is a little puzzled by it all. *The Poetic Image* suffers from a rather profound intellectual relaxation and corruption. The terminology is ill-defined, or so shopworn as to be meaningless. Arguments are proposed with a sprightly anecdote or quotation, and get lost on the following page. Vagueness is manipulated to give an illusion of sense. Mr. Day Lewis professes his scorn of critical analysis, considers Professor Livingston Lowes the leading American critic, and believes that certain poems of Donne and Herbert are hopelessly outdated because they make mention of mechanisms no longer in common use. He also has the unfortunately common habit of speaking disapprovingly and at length of modern poetry, while giving very few examples and almost no analysis. His book, originally a series of lectures (which is no excuse), proceeds from a discussion of the function of imagery to a consideration of how poems are written, and ends on the grand scale (complete with a reference to the atomic bomb) with an explanation of poetry itself. In the course of all this, Mr. Day Lewis also supplies a history of poetry (culminating, of course, in the Romantics), and manages to touch on almost all the important problems of criticism without getting into any of them. His book is, in intent at least, the most ambitious of the four here considered, but he scorns the disciplines that give merit to the other three. The moral seems to be that it is only through the humility of close analysis that criticism can aspire to the elevation of the judgment seat.

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The Self Language

CORNELIA CLAIBORNE

MONSIEUR TESTE, by *Paul Valéry*, translated by Jackson Mathews. Alfred A. Knopf. $5.00

JACKSON MATHEWS' VERY COMPETENT translation of *Monsieur Teste* serves as an elegy for one of the last rationalists of the French literary tradition. Conditioned by the exotic era of reaction against the marmorean poetic forms of the Parnassians and the clinical brutality of the naturalist novel, the Symbolist movement found a coherent conclusion in Valery's passionately controlled intellect. In a literary atmosphere dominated by Verlaine's melancholy music and Rimbaud's precocious savagery, Valéry derived his main directive force from Mallarmé's austere Tuesday evening soirées. They provided a tight little island of discipline for this vague literary climate. Mallarmé's disciplined effort toward a pure expression of the individual intellect had evolved a language of implication and suggestion which strove elliptically to arrive at some supreme flash of eternal reality. Valéry succeeded in consolidating the mysterious and often incoherent new dimensions of individual perception into a strict algebra of the intellect, and thereby integrated it with the French tradition of "loi et clarté". Valéry used this machinery of form to follow the movements of the mind to completion, which once completed, would produce intuitive flashes of reality according to its own rhythm; but he discovered that the rhythm of poetic creation intruded sensual distractions on the rhythm of the intellect. To give his complete attention to interior contemplation, he renounced poetry for twenty years. In this period he wrote *Monsieur Teste,* a drama of consciousness. M. Teste is a delightful monster of pure consciousness. He lives on modest speculations on the stock market, sleeps in a greenish bedroom smelling of mint, takes a daily walk with his wife in an ancient park "where all people of thought, care and monologue go." He appears as a "winter rose" to his wife, a man without an image to his friend, and a bit incoherent at times to the reader. Altogether, he acts as a consciousness would act if it were a man. Stylistically, *Monsieur Teste* vibrates with tense intellectual action tempered by a deliciously rarefied wit and occasionally luminous imagistic texture.

The setting of this "interior drama" is established in the preface where Valéry says "To give some idea of such a monster, to portray his appearance and his habits requires the use, if not the invention, of a forced language at times energetically abstract. It requires also a tone of familiarity and even a few traces of vulgarity or triviality which we use with ourselves." M. Teste's

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language, almost devoid of images, gives the complete impression of an abstract consciousness. When he does make comparisons, they are comparisons of abstractions. In M. Teste's logbook, which is the record of his consciousness talking to itself, there are no images that would detract from the rigid relationships of pure thought. In the "Poem, Translated From the Self Language" beginning "O Consciousness!" and his remark, after a complicated abstract statement, that "This is the last word in inner politics" there are exquisite traces of the familiarity with which M. Teste's consciousness treats itself. But the imagery is restricted to the language of Mme. Teste and M. Teste's friend, since their function in this drama is to suggest the idea of M. Teste through their contact with him. The action of the drama moves in a direction that will reveal M. Teste to the reader through the impressions of Mme. Teste and the friend. He is finally presented in the abstract in the *Excerpts From M. Teste's Logbook* which serve as the "point culminant" of the drama. The friend describes the habits of M. Teste, his appearance, his reactions to the Opera, in a rich imagistic framework. . . . "I can see him standing with the golden column of the Opera . . .he was breathing in the great blast of brilliance on the edge of the pit. . . . I watched his skull making acquaintance with the angles of the capital, his right hand refreshing itself among the gilt ornaments. . . . From a distant part of the theatre his eyes came back to me." Mme. Teste, a creature of caprice and sensibility, suggests the idea of M. Teste through her marital relations. . . . "He is hard as an angel. . . . I feel myself living and moving in a cage which his superior mind has closed around me simply by existing. . . ." Actually the friend and Mme. Teste themselves are extensive images used to suggest M. Teste, who finally appears in abstract purity in the logbook. This structural device follows closely the doctrine of the Symbolist movement.

In *Monsieur Teste* the contemporary philosophical atmosphere converged upon Valéry's interior explorations to emerge when he began to write poetry again in a remarkable union with his aesthetic theory. The philosophical ancestors of M. Teste certainly include Pascal and his "frissons métaphysiques", Descartes and his "precise awareness of his whole being marshalled before his own attention" and, to a lesser degree, Comte, "in whose study" M. Teste was actually created, although this clue is somewhat misleading. As a poet, Valéry tried to escape Comte's grim-visaged positivism in order to suggest some intuitive flash of the ultimate in the indefinite realm of symbolism; but, as an intelligence, he was obliged to discipline the mind, which once complete, would return to the intuitive flash with its own surely disciplined rhythm. M. Teste is conceived in Comte's study while Valéry is affected with the "acute malady of precision." There is a similarity between Comte's practice of "Hygène Cérébrale", demanding complete isolation from the exterior world to avoid the

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dispersion of his thoughts and Teste's firm rule of mental discipline—"I have had no books for twenty years. I have burned my papers also." But the comparison does not extend much farther. It was Comte's method of painstaking progression to certainty by the relation of a given fact and some more general fact that M. Teste used in his "voyage into himself armed to the teeth." Although the applications of his conscious studies were in the end mathematical relationships, M. Teste belonged in the realm of metaphysics. M. Teste later makes it quite clear that he has completely transcended the prenatal influence of Comte's study—"Science!" he says, "There are only scientists . . . there are moments when everything seems clear and fulfilled and there are no problems. At such a time science no longer exists." M. Teste was a consciousness spawned in a metaphysical region which Descartes and Pascal had explored considerably. He had early known "the importance of what might be called human plasticity. He had tried to find out its limits and its laws." But his ancestors, the Pascalian and the Cartesian intelligences, had kept their feet on the ground whereas M. Teste soared balloonlike into a vast intellectual stratosphere, leaving behind the ballast upon which the voyage depended. That ballast was matter. M. Teste jettisoned his ballast, saying, "That which constrains me is not wholly me," which was quite logical since M. Teste was a pure consciousness. That is why Valéry says "M. Teste is impossible."

There is an interesting philosophical kinship between M. Teste and Bergson (who might be termed the philosopher of the symbolist movement) that serves to reestablish Valéry's disciplined intellectualism in a delicate relationship with the aesthetic theory of Symbolism. M. Teste contains the elements of the Bergsonian consciousness, which went beyond science (a point which never could have been attained without previous scientific discipline), reaching a spontaneous intuition of intimate contact with the real. This Bergsonian consciousness, although distinct from the organism it animates, must undergo its vicissitudes. These vicissitudes were M. Teste's demons. Realizing that "the notion of external things is a restriction upon inner combinations" he tried to destroy his organism. One evening he remarked with ferocity, "I scribble in the flesh". In M. Teste's titanic attempt to free his consciousness (or himself, to be more accurate) to pass through matter without settling on it and adapting himself to it, he lost a friend.

M. Teste receives a farewell letter from a friend who finds himself too occupied with the wonders of the transitory to see him again. On his journey to Paris he writes, "The train was still running, violently flinging back poplars, cows, barns and all earthly things as if it thirsted, as if it were rushing toward pure thought. What supreme goal can exact such ravishment." The friend represents the thing that M. Teste has tried to devour in himself . . . that part of consciousness that must undergo the vicissitudes of response to

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external stimuli. In this departing friend, there are hints of Valéry's artistic sensibility gorged with perceptions in which "everything took the form of images. Abstract struggles took the form of sorcery or devils." Valéry presents the murkier aspects of Symbolism in a charming passage. The word intellectual comes to his mind. "*Intellectual?* No answer. . . . No ideas. . . . Trees, signal disks, harps without number, from the horizontal strings of which plains, chateaux and wisps of smoke fluttered out. . . . I was now looking at myself with foreign eyes, stumbling about in what I had just created. Bewildered in the midst of this debris of the intelligible, I found lying inert as if knocked down, the big word that had caused the catastrophe. It was no doubt a little too long for the curves of my brain." Here is the essentially symbolist perception that suggests an abstraction by summoning observations of the known world about it and, as Valéry admits with charming irony, the abstraction is found lying inert among the clutter of images. He adds, "We never get to the bottom of anything in literature." It is a case of the Bergsonian consciousness again which loses its freedom and the novelty of the free act by adapting itself to the matter through which it passes. The intellect is pushed into the conceptual forms into which it is accustomed to see matter fit, resulting in a constant compounding of the same with the same. The split between M. Teste and his friend, and Valéry's renunciation of poetry for the study of the complete mind are analogous.

After the split with his friend, M. Teste gradually becomes a pure consciousness . . . with no being to give him formal boundaries he slips into the frontier between being and not being and finally disappears to the rarefied strains of a "funeral march of thought". The solution to the split between M. Teste, who vanished into the ether of not-being, and his friend, who wandered into the brilliant morasses of perception, points to Bergson's conception of consciousness. He sees it as a rising wave opposed by the descending movement of matter and converted into a vortex. At one point the wave passes freely, dragging with it the obstacle which slows its processes but cannot stop it. It bears a close resemblance to Valéry's idea of the complete mind which would function in a rhythmic flow, at times diverted by perception of the exterior world, but which would constantly be capable of intuitive contact with an ultimate reality. When he returned to poetry, Valéry maintained that delicate relationship between the flow of the complete mind and the variegated diversions of the exterior world, suggesting through these perceptions the intuitive feel of an abstract expansion toward an ultimate reality. In representing these delicate relationships, Valéry discovered a new dimension in language that completed the work of the Symbolists in revitalizing the French literary tradition.

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Recent Phenomena

J. S. SHRIKE

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR IN THE HUMAN MALE, by *Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin.* W. B. Saunders Co. $6.50
THE CITY AND THE PILLAR, by *Gore Vidal.* E. P. Dutton, $3.50
OTHER VOICES, OTHER ROOMS, by *Truman Capote.* Random House. $2.75

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR IN THE HUMAN MALE, as the title indicates, has little to do with man, but is concerned with the human animal, the human male:

> A scientist studying sex should be able to accept any type of sexual behavior objectively, listen to the record without adverse reaction, and record without social or moral evaluation. That much is expected of the student measuring the length of insect wings, recording the chemical changes that occur in a test tube, or observing the colors of the stars.

The book is elaborately, and doubtlessly accurately, grounded on a statistical comparison of case-histories extending from "Persons in the Social Register" to prostitutes of both sexes. Messrs. Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin have in general confined themselves to an impartial analysis of their statistics, the principal importance of which lies in the disclosure that those sexual activities which are forbidden by Church and State are much more prevalent than has been generally supposed. This information, as the publisher points out, should be of especial value to teachers, directors of corrective institutions, law-enforcement groups, and personnel officers. Its value to society as a whole is in its demonstration that the State is unjust when it legally punishes such activities. Yet the State, to survive, must encourage the reproduction of its citizens. Historically, when the *terrena civitas* tolerates sexual activities which do not have procreation as an object, its worldly power begins to decay.

Whether the book is of value to parents leads us into difficulties: children are certainly human animals, but their origin is elsewhere, their flesh has been formed by a breath as well as a seed. Thus, our quarrel with these gentlemen is solely with their metaphysics, not with their techniques or their findings. They conveniently summarize their position:

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> All living organisms, from the lowest to the highest, are modified by the experiences through which they pass. This modifiability is one of the intrinsic qualities of living protoplasm. In any creature with a nervous system which is as highly developed as that found in the vertebrates, particularly in the primates, this conditioning becomes a paramount factor in determining the animal's behavior.

Was this belief in the minds of the researchers before they began their study? But this is not the occasion for an assault on behaviorism. One can only remark that they bring before us once again the drastic concept of man as mechanism, the "human male" as sluice-gate for a flood of appetites and fears—the atoms of Democritus, impact and pressure:

> It is evident, however, that psychologic processes depend, to a considerable degree, upon the way in which external forces impinge upon the animal. For a creature with as highly organized a central nervous system as is found in the human animal, the most important external force is the social environment in which it lives.

The books of two young novelists, published at approximately the same time as the sexual study, deal directly with this "most important external force" in its relation to individuals practicing forbidden sexual activities. Mr. Vidal's book is honestly concerned with the social problem; his book is primarily a tract, and the awkward polemic and exhortation that he forces from the mouths of his puppets proceed from hatred of injustice and zeal for reform. Mr. Capote goes to great pains and many flourishes to convince us that he has nothing to do with either "social environment" or injustice, yet his sketchbook (there is no resemblance to a novel) comes to life only during the thirteen pages in which he chooses to portray the moral collapse of a homosexual frustrated by social prohibitions.

Mr. Vidal's and Mr. Capote's books support to a remarkable degree findings of Messrs. Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin. The study affirms that the lifetime pattern of sexual behavior is largely determined by the experiences of adolescence because they are initial, and because adolescence is the time of greatest sexual activity. Mr. Vidal's hero is irrevocably corrupted by his initial adolescent experience; Mr. Capote creates suspense by threatening the seduction of a thirteen year old boy throughout a series of sketches, and uses the youth's acquiescence to conclude the book. Mr. Vidal's book gives us detailed accounts of organized group activities of homesexuals in Beverly Hills and Manhattan, corroborating the findings of the researchers for the large urban areas. Mr. Capote's Randolph is an example of the researchers' isolated rural homosexual. Mr. Vidal's hero and the film star who keeps him are both physically strong and active and are certainly covered by the Kinsey observations on the homo-

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sexual activities of laboring ranchmen and lumbermen. Both Mr. Vidal's hero and Mr. Capote's Randolph, though emotionally attached to uncompromising individuals, have at some time been, in the Kinsey terminology, "concerned with finding a succession of partners, no one of whom will provide more than a few contacts." Mr. Vidal's hero is, at the critical moment, twice unable to engage in heterosexual activity; Mr. Capote's succeeds for some months; Messrs. Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin would therefore place the former among the 8% of human males who are "exclusively homosexual", and the latter among the 18% who "have as much homosexual as heterosexual in their natures". The researchers sum up their study of homosexuality with the statement that it is "biologically basic in mammalian and anthropoid behavior" and thus that no criteria of normality and abnormality are valid in considering sexual behavior. Mr. Vidal's book abounds with situations started in the intent and so compelled that they will flare up in rhetorical utterances on this theme and denunciations of the society which will not recognize it. Mr. Capote is muted by comparison, but Randolph, his creature, finds that "any love is natural and beautiful" in spite of the fact that such love is isolated, "so fierce is the world's ridicule."

Aside from its sociological demonstration, Mr. Vidal's book is undistinguished. It is humorless, and most of its scenes are faked, as are the house interiors, the natural landscapes, and all the characters. The hero, a tennis professional, is a stiff automaton. Mr. Vidal is anxious to present him as a vigorous man completely subject to physical instincts and, aside from an occasional tour of duty as mouthpiece for the reflections on society, life, death, etc., allows him nothing more than an occasional visit to the movies. The minor characters have been methodically thumbnailed in conventional types: "One rather old actress, almost forty"; "Many men had loved her and she had loved many men"; "He was a curious man. He suffered continually and inwardly." One could compile a long list of such awkward imperceptions. The author attempts satire, attempts "white wine and sadness", attempts reference to Genesis and Proust; but the results are painful in the extreme.

The City and the Pillar, although faithfully serving the psychiatric jargon, is at its most profound when philosophic and prophetic, as when its hero envisages the milennium brought about by free homosexuality:

> The animal of sex, if free, would in turn free men and women. . . . For by an open love of other men as well as of women wars might cease and a new period might come about; one in which there would be more peace and more self-fulfillment than there is now.

Mr. Vidal and Mr. Capote are widely separated on the question of style. Mr. Vidal prefers the economy of understatement:

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> He climbed the steps to the Garden Hotel. It was a large and rambling white stucco hotel. In some places it was six stories high and in other places it was only one story. Palm trees edged the hotel, tall trees in orderly rows. Green vines grew on the white stucco walls: the Garden Hotel was a very pretty place. Jim was glad that he was going to live in it. . . . This garden had given the hotel its name and its reputation. Many flowers grew there. The colors were vivid and Jim got dizzy looking at them. There were several paths leading between the banks of flowers.

Mr. Capote, on the other hand, prefers the grand rhetorical style:

> Whereupon the room commenced to vibrate slightly, then more so, chairs overturned, the curio cabinet spilled its contents, a mirror cracked, the pianola, composing its own doomed jazz, held a haywire jamboree: down went the house, down into the earth, down, down, past Indian tombs, past the deepest root, the coldest stream, down, down, into the furry arms of horned children whose bumblebee eyes withstand forests of flame.

The two books are in agreement, however, in their use of sensationalism as the stylistic vehicle for the expression of sexual emotion, allowing the same sensations in the homosexual that the SATURDAY EVENING POST and TRUE CONFESSIONS allow in the heterosexual:

Mr. Vidal's book:

> Jim felt as if his entire body was exploding, was clashing rocketlike in this release. Lights glittered in circles behind his closed eyelids and his breathing stopped. This was his world and he was alive.

Mr. Capote, presenting his adolescent as *voyeur* in a heterosexual situation:

> . . . watching them it had been as if his heart were beating all over his body, and all undefined whisperings had gathered into one yearning roar: he knew now, and it was not a giggle or a sudden whitehot word; only two people with each other in withness.

On the question of death, the young writers are in substantial agreement.

Mr. Vidal:

> His hand would come apart and his memories would be spilled in the ground where there was nothing: only insentient growth. Perhaps the earth in him would grow again into other things and he would exist again, for the particles of which he was made were indestructible; but his consciousness, his ego would be lost and not exist again.

Mr. Capote gratifies his reader with rhetorical embellishment:

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> . . . when they were dead, it would be still like now: these trees, that sky, this earth, those acorn seeds, sun and wind, all the same, while they, with dust-turned hearts, change only. . . . In the woods they walked, the tireless singings of larks had sounded a century, and more, and floods of frogs had galloped in moonlight bands; stars had fallen here, and Indian arrows too; prancing blacks had played guitars, sung ballads of bandit-buried gold, sung songs grieving and ghostly, ballads of long ago; before birth.

Capote's book is largely a dreary waste; the style at first ineptly sterilized, but later gross with ridiculous luxuriance; the portraiture, major and minor, is of such insensitivity and clumsiness that, except for the study of the homosexual, it is insupportably dull. Mr. Capote is fatally attracted by rich prose. When he holds himself back, as in the first ninety-eight pages, his work is infantile, dumb with botched detail, wooden scenes, and collapsed characterizations. In this withheld manner, he is a master of the clichés of portraiture: little one-armed men "glower"; a hat is worn "with dashing pride"; a girl is "dumb-looking"; "the mean tears would not stay back"; farmhouses are "sorry-looking"; a man shakes his head "in a baffled manner"; a boy does "hateful things"; beer is "gulped", and afterwards the truck-driver "let forth a mighty belch and grinned"; the color of the sky is like "some queer wine"; a man has a "funny derby hat perched rakishly on his head"; ladies move "with robber stealth"; "mean expressions pinch" the face of a Negress; a girl is "mean, just gut-mean"; a man "smiles wanly"; a house is "queer" and "freakish"; "antiquated ladies" live in "Gothic splendor"—an endless list.

When he no longer withholds, but proceeds as his inspiration would lead him, Mr. Capote plunges steeply into the overripe, and throws forth a profusion of clichés of the opposite type, clichés of extension: "the frightening volcano of her mouth"; "when the noon of youth burned whitest"; "the garbage of loneliness stuffed down us until our guts burst bleeding green, we go screaming round the world"; "there would always be this journey through dying rooms until some lonely day she found her hidden one, the smiler with the knife"—there are many more. Yet when infrequently he succeeds at this sort of thing, the effect is remarkable. He has a taste for the fantastic grotesque and his successful effects are drawn closely from the tradition of the fairy tale; they are all descriptive effects, and run from one paragraph to two pages in length. The legendary description of The Cloud Hotel (a haunted place), the descriptions of the settling sounds of the principal house, of entering Mr. Sansom's room, of crossing the creek where the serpent lurks, of a fairy queen lit by lightning on a ferris-wheel, of the refuge in a haunted house during the storm, and of the concluding sunset vision in the garden, are manifestations of imaginative power in the rare genre of the fairy tale.

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Mr. Capote tries to extend this rare and native gift to encompass symbolism but cannot succeed. His symbolism is inchoate, unjustified, unrealized. His attempted symbols remain as described figures, imagined entities arbitrary in their existence, and bearing no relation to the tale. The bluejay who is trapped, killed, and later mounted on cardboard is meant to suggest that Randolph, the homosexual, will likewise trap and destroy the youth. The bluejay is most vivid as an artifact; it is a beautiful handiwork, a device, a golden smithy for a fairy tale; but its existence is arbitrary; it will not relate. The attempted symbolic liaison between Ivory Soap and snow is of a much lower order; it is mere whimsy. The homosexual is represented as a zero cipher, Mr. Sansom as the sun, the youth as a goat, the mule as The Hanged Man, but the symbols are unstable; they slip, slide, and dissolve into impressions. Mr. Capote at times forces his imagery into surrealism: "the strand of grey winding in her mousy hair was like a streak of lightning", and does homage to Henry Miller with the following passage and the one quoted earlier about the horned children:

> The good die cold, the wicked in flames: the winds of hell are blue with the sweet ether of fever-flowers, horned snake-tongued children dance on lawns that are the surface of the sun, all loot from thievery tied to their tails like cat-cans.

Since Mr. Capote apparently will not permit himself to write a long fairy tale, he is forced to collect a series of sketches and publish them as a novel. He includes almost all forms of sexual activity, among them rape and transvestism (about which the Kinsey researchers are reticent); he includes his capable history of Randolph's life; his fairy-tale descriptions; and the long "withheld" sections. There is no excuse for the book in its present form.

It is obvious that Mr. Capote has talent, but it is not a promising talent; it is a ruined one, and Mr. Capote is only partly to blame for what he has lost. Whether he is conscious of the irony involved in his quotation of the artist's creed from the conclusion of James' *The Middle Years*, I know not; the conjunction is ominous.

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